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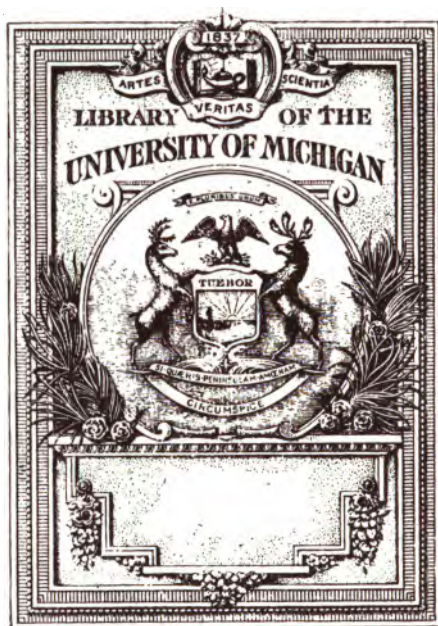
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FRUGALITY *in the* SPIRITUAL LIFE

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BY

W. L. WATKINSON

*Author of "The Supreme Conquest," "The Duty of
Imperial Thinking," "Studies in Christian
Character," etc.*



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I

FRUGALITY IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost.—JOHN vi. 12 (R. V.).

NOTHING in the record of this wonderful miracle is more wonderful than the command on which we comment. It is a touch that authenticates the entire story. Had this narrative been merely fiction, the author of it would never have introduced this feature; he would have been too much carried away by his marvellous creation to have thought of such a prosaic detail; indeed, to have done so would have seemed like marring the magnificence of the whole by a somewhat beggarly idea. Magicians who by the waving of a wand provide dazzling banquets never think of gathering up scraps. But as we have said, the prudential thought of our Lord is a striking proof of His greatness and of the reality of His miracle. Scientists find in

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Nature, with its almost infinite exuberance and plenitude, a stern principle of economy which they know as the law of parsimony—that is, Nature permits no waste; and the power and glory of our Lord exhibit precisely the same divine reticence. We are not about to give this text an arbitrary application. The great principle here set forth by the Master is, that what seems mean and worthless is not really so, that it is equally important with the rest, not to be despised and rejected, but reserved to high uses. What we propose is, to give the principle our Lord honoured, not only a legitimate application, but, indeed, its highest.

The things and events of ordinary human life commonly despised are designed for our moral enrichment, and if properly treated they yield us utmost advantage. The lives of the multitude are dull, their occupations monotonous, their circumstances narrow, and it is easy for them to think that they are called to subsist on the fragments of the rich feast which Nature provides. They gather the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table; they exist on the broken victuals of the world's greatness, luxury, and gaiety. Yet what infinite

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blessing and gratefulness are secured by a commonplace life nobly lived! If we learn its deep teachings and profit by its strengthening discipline, we shall find it ample indeed for the grandest purpose. The majority of men never think of the wonderful efficacy of triviality properly understood and exercised. Artists tell us that the pompous and magnificent masterpieces from which all trivial elements are eliminated are strangely destitute of power; they may please the eye, but they do not move the soul: through the trivial the greatest painters attain the sublime. Supreme poets like Dante, Shakespeare, and Bunyan, by a continual use of trivial images, by allusions to the most familiar scenes and experiences, bring their mighty dreams within our vision. And the greatest orators do not hold us in thrall by ample phrase, skilful rhetoric, and splendid tropes, unless they mingle with these homeliest images and appeals. Persons who despise the commonplace little think of its great ministry to art, literature, and eloquence. The familiar is often the sublime in disguise; the fact is there is no sublimity without it.

We certainly need to remember this in regard

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to our spiritual life. The vast number of men adduce the poverty of their lot, the fewness of their gifts, the sordidness of life's struggles, as the sufficient reason of their moral and spiritual pauperism. But this would not be so were we to gather up the fragments, to treasure them, to extract from them all of wisdom and blessing that God puts into them. Suppose we were to bring an intelligent, sympathetic, prayerful mind to bear on all the minutiae of daily life, and to keep on patiently with our deeply interested pursuit through all the changing years, should we then have any reason to bemoan the paucity of our lot or the meanness of the moral result? The dullest, most impoverished sphere of life duly improved will find us strong in faith, instructed in understanding, disciplined in principle, rich in kindness, full of good fruits. But we allow so much to glide away as worthless commonplace; we despise the ever-recurring lessons, the duties, the pleasures, the sorrows, of ordinary days, forgetting that one and all of these are fraught with precious spiritual blessing, even as the most unpromising ores often yield most abundant gold. Extreme poverty may in worldly things limit a man's creations and achievements; yet even here, as one of our writers

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observes, "the very fewness of a designer's resources but spurs him to all the more ingenuity. It depends upon who the man is." Yes, it always depends upon who the man is. Worldly things need never circumscribe our spiritual life and advantage; and if we are the right men, they never will. It depends upon what kind of mind and heart we bring to bear on current circumstance. Thousands of the members of the Christian Church are little other than veritable moral beggars, in consequence, they aver, of their dreary lot and miserable opportunity—how miserably clothed and fed they are as the angels see them!—whilst others with no better environment are millionaires in the abiding wealth. If we bring to daily life vision, sensibility, and love, gathering up the fragments, we shall find that what appears cast-off clothing is purple, that broken victuals are manna, and that the very rubbish of things is rich with the dust of spiritual gold.

And the joyfulness of life is largely dependent upon the economy which utilises the simple and despised stuff out of which common days are made. A German writer makes this wise observation: "Constant attention to the host of neglected but ever-recurring pleasures which every

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hour brings with it is most profitable. How many agreeable emotions, the recollection of which would be a permanent pleasure, are allowed to pass unheeded every day! With Jean Paul we should learn to weigh every success—every realized wish.” Nothing is more important in life than to discern, enjoy, and utilise the host of commonplace pleasures which every hour brings; and, more than anything else, the neglect of this duty makes life so vacant and poor. We think that our happiness is bound up with rarer and larger things, and fail to get out of passing incidents and duties the sweetness, strength, light, and cheerfulness with which they are fraught; with a great opinion of Kew Gardens, we despise or overlook wayside flowers. How much of the wealth of life is missed through this blindness! Sacred plants and blossoms, such as the lily, the palm, and the passion-flower, we view with reverence; we dote upon splendid roses and orchids: but the myriad flowerets which tincture the hedgerow and embroider the dusty highways that we traverse day by day are ignored, and we are all the poorer for the oversight. We are ready enough to permit the small, commonplace things of our journey to trouble and irritate us when-

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ever they have the least tendency so to do; the sniff of the ditch, the scratch of the brier, the thorn in the foot, the nettle incautiously handled, the fog, the shower, the dust—these we notice and bewail quite extravagantly; but the thousand and one little things of quiet beauty and blessing which strew the path are unconsidered and forgotten.

How ingenious children are in getting all possible enjoyment out of the scantiest material and the poorest opportunities! In the great, hard, gloomy city they overcome the difficulties of their situation most cleverly and find their fill of amusement. A strip of green grass with a few daisies is to them a veritable paradise, and they get all the honey out of it, as the city bees do. An iron bar across the corner of a crowded street is a coign of vantage quickly detected, and immediately appropriated for a swing, although it will allow oscillations of only a few inches. A scantling of timber left on any available spot is forthwith converted into a see-saw, and a crowd of little ones raise shouts of laughter for hours together. A bit of hot, busy pavement is all they ask for an Olympia. A soap-box is deftly transformed into a carriage which carries more joy than any equipage in Rot-

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ten Row. A wayside puddle is a rapture to their wild eyes, as the Pacific was in the eyes of Cortez; and no nobleman finds more pleasure in gilded yacht on summer seas than do the little adventurers who follow the fortunes of their paper boats. A skipping-rope, a rough toy, a frail kite, is sufficient to delight them all the summer day. In the advent of an organ-grinder they realize the Italian opera as few in the theatre do. We should all be the better were we in mind and heart more like the child, finding joy in the simple, natural things of daily life and duty. If our Master were visibly amongst us once more, He would "put a little child in our midst." The truth and simplicity of soul which find wonder, gratitude, instruction, blessing, in a host of ordinary trifling things are far more rational and admirable than the dull or critical temper which finds pleasure in nothing except it is big and strange or lavishly painted and gilded. How many agreeable emotions should we get out of the common days and tasks if we had more of the ingenuity, artlessness, and enthusiasm of the little child!

The mind of the scholar, which is also essentially a childlike mind, is likewise most ingenious in finding wonder and beauty in common things.

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We sometimes say that "little minds are pleased with little things"; but the truth is often quite the other way—it is the great minds that are most pleased with little things. Saunter down a country lane with a botanist, and he will soon show that weeds, sedge, and dog-roses are full of special teaching and beauty. The conchologist by the seashore demonstrates that the commonest shell has a music of its own for those who know how to listen. The mineralogist discovers so much fascination in an old rough wall that one might think it the same that St. John saw, built of all manner of precious stones. The microscopist can see in the dull spots on a lantern-slide scraps of paradise. This is ever the case; the great, clear mind beholds in unconsidered trivialities of Nature gleams of eternal beauty, feels in them the infinite thought and love, finds in them bread enough and to spare. Greatness of soul reveals itself in the power to detect the greatness of all things, even the most trite. Love finds infinite poetry in trinkets that goldsmiths would scorn. Knowledge enjoys "Arabian Nights" in the light of common days. Genius brings marvels out of vulgar trifles. The rare mind and the great heart are moved by all sorts of familiar things utterly

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unmeaning to commonplace persons—that is, to persons full of ignorance, conceit, and selfishness. The measure of our intellectual greatness is exactly indicated in our capacity to discern the great meanings of what is simple, small, and stale. How much should we Christians gain were we to cultivate this habit of observation, insight, and appreciation, and to realize the glory and goodness of God in the host of neglected but ever-recurring pleasures which every hour brings!

“To put extortion on common things” is what we need to learn almost more than anything else. We need wait the invention of no new, strange pleasure; we simply require to open our eyes to a thousand neglected things; we need to weigh every success, every realized wish, to treasure up the agreeable emotions which are allowed to pass unheeded every day. How rich should we be in thought, feeling, memory, hope, if we thus economized and treasured all life’s sensations and possibilities of sensation! Some time ago they took up and cremated the woollen carpet which for several years had covered the coiners’ room in the San Francisco mint. The precious ashes were scrupulously gathered, and by an elaborate refining process the Government recovered two

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hundred and seventy-nine ounces of gold, worth five thousand five hundred dollars. So the common things which we heedlessly trample are full of the dust of gold, if we only knew it. Four pounds of gold were not so long ago collected from the soot of the chimney of the Royal Mint in Berlin. So the things accounted vulgar are full of the dust of gold, if we only knew it. We need a quick eye, a ready mind, to let no chance pass us, to be taught by everything, improved by everything. Neglect in this matter brings into our life heaviness, dullness, weariness, vacancy. Let us be alive to every wayside flower in the home, to every flower that springs amid the rough stones of business life, to every sweet thing that blooms in the very dust of the street, to the teachings, the mercies, the comforts, the strengthenings, of common days, places, things, and people: so shall we be charmed along life's pilgrimage until we arrive at home.

II

DAILY PERFECTING

Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.—
2 CORINTHIANS iv. 16 (R. V.).

THE visible man feels the wear and weight of years; the friction of life gradually exhausts: the eye grows dim, the ear loses its sensitiveness, the limbs miss their firmness and flexibility, the feet their elasticity and fleetness; but the interior man need know no ageing. If the oldest angels are the youngest, the oldest mortals ought to be the youngest also in freshness of soul. An unintermitting growth in inward strength and joy is the duty and privilege of every one of us. And this is a consequence largely dependent upon ourselves. The divine grace is ever freely given, but its reception and exercise depend upon our personal vigilance and fidelity; everything turns upon our habitual use

and improvement of the heavenly gift. We are too apt to care for the soul by fits and starts, and against this error the text warns us.

God does not perfect us at a stroke, but by constant and protracted discipline.—Not by violent action and sudden leaps, but by the hallowing of our personality through all the days and years. A man's conversion will often seem abrupt; yet even here secret processes of renewal have been going on, just as they do in the chrysalis, out of which suddenly emerges the butterfly. And in subsequent regeneration there is a gradual unfolding of the deeper man of the heart, the measured growth of the spirit in goodness and glory. In the teaching of science we may learn a lesson touching the evolution of the soul. Although volcanic energy has ever been active, and eruptions, earthquakes, and subsidences of the land have taken place in all ages, scientists are satisfied that the earth as we now see it was not fashioned on any large scale by convulsions, dislocations, and cataclysms, but that its conformation was chiefly determined by the slow, ordinary, silent agencies which operate to-day—rain, streams, heat, cold, frost, and snow. The great shaping forces have acted continuously and noise-

lessly, bringing about the grand features of the planet as we now behold them. Nature has her crises, but the soft and deliberate evolution is her predominate method. Much the same is true of character. We are not lifted to heaven by startling upheavals, purified by catastrophes, perfected by mighty changes occurring at distant intervals; in the perfecting of the soul as in the development of the planet the constant force and its imperceptible workings count for most. Little by little does God by His Spirit bring out of us the infinite beauty and glory which He first put into us when we were made in His own image and likeness. What such perfection means who may say?

1. *Let us daily instruct and uplift our mind through communion with the truth.*—Goethe said that we ought every day to see at least one fine work of art, to hear one sweet strain of music, to read one beautiful poem. Wherever such inspirations are practicable they are unquestionably most desirable. We are daily subjected to the belittling and coarsening influence of mean and material things, and it is delightful to refresh the mind with great thoughts and imaginations; happy indeed is he who can turn from the com-

monplace world to succour his soul with the fresh light and dew of the intellectual universe. But far more than we need this bread of mental delight do we need daily bread for our spiritual imagination and reason, for the building up of our highest life in the glory and contentment of righteousness. Each day plunges us into a veritable vortex of worldly care; and if we are successfully to withstand the sordid stress, we must persist to commune with higher things. We must return again and again to the sacred page to gaze on some illuminating picture painted by the great Master's hand; to listen to a fresh strain of the eternal music; to read another divine poem, telling of the tenderness of the Father's heart and the beauty of His infinite perfection. By the daily renewing of the mind we become greatly wise and strong. The neglect of this duty means the letting down of the soul little by little, until it reaches depths of dullness and decay, and we cannot by a sheer act of the will lift ourselves to the nobler levels whence we have fallen. No wonder that so many are sick and sad, seeing how seriously they neglect that most Holy Word which is the manna by which we live, the fountain of our light and strength. We hear much of

“fasting men” who manage to live a very long time on very little; but the Church can beat the world hollow at this trick. On the most insignificant morsels of truth and grace, partaken of at irregular and distant intervals, Christians contrive to subsist. They live, however, with the pathetic life which is ever at the point of death. Let us pray that, in the highest sense, God may give us our daily bread, and, when it is given, let us see that we eat it. Little and often will leave us fat and flourishing.

2. *By daily fellowship with God let us preserve the soul pure and vigorous.*—We need daily cleansing. What should we say of one who attended to his personal cleanliness once a month or once a week? We should count him an eccentric individual, and not a pleasant one. The thought of the thing is odious. Yet many act thus spiritually. What a contrast between the spotless skin and the unwashed soul? God sees it if we do not. All reputable persons are ever solicitous concerning their physical purity; they scrupulously attend to their personal appearance many times a day; the satirist reproaches some of us for living between “the comb and the glass”; and the cleansing of the soul must be maintained

with the same system and ardour if it is to abide in strength and beauty. The air is full of "blacks," which soil the soul as well as the skin, and we have ever need to repeat the prayer—

"Anoint and cheer our soiled face
With the abundance of Thy grace."

"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice." For we must remember that we can never spasmodically retrieve what has been systematically neglected. Or, to change the figure, some housekeepers habitually neglect their duty with the notion that everything can be fetched up by a "spring cleaning." Really they can do no such thing. If a house is to be truly orderly and beautiful, it must be kept so perennially; no annual spasm can atone for the looseness of three hundred and sixty-five days. In the religious life our house must be set in order daily. Any remissness in systematic vigilance and industry means so much spiritual confusion and loss. Day by day in repeated aspiration and petition must we speak with Heaven; so shall we be cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

3. *Make the best of every-day discipline.*—Carefully improve life's routine and commonplace as well as study to improve its extraordinary occasions. We have all noticed men in a comparatively small way of business who seem to have little chance of accumulating wealth, yet when they pass away everybody is surprised to find that they possessed large property. We then ask how they became thus rich. No one left them anything, they did not gamble, they robbed no one, no splendid speculation or windfall enriched them, yet they amassed wealth out of all proportion to their position. Then it begins to dawn upon the public that the diligent shopkeeper had been steadily making and accumulating pound after pound, persevering in self-denial and thrift year after year, with the result at which society wondered. "So is every one that is rich toward God." Faithful stewards of His manifold gifts, they go on day by day bringing conscience into small responsibilities, embodying great principles in trifling things, sanctifying commonplaces with the Word of God and prayer, until they become millionaires of the incorruptible treasure, abounding in purity and peace, love and hope. The fullest sanctification of daily routine is one of

the greatest secrets that the serious have to learn. Extraordinary things fascinate us, we fix upon them our whole attention, and from them expect the results which determine time and eternity, whilst the commonplace of life is practically despised. It is not less than a fatal mistake. The gold and diamonds of Brazil are of immense value; they are earnestly sought and much talked about, they afford fine material for romance; yet the exports from that country of vulgar articles like sugar and coffee are of more value than all the gold and jewels found in that territory in fifty years. It is much the same with our moral life: the major profit lies in the wise handling of daily homely things, in the sanctification of experiences in which there is nothing akin either to poetry or history, and not in the tragedies and triumphs which at distant intervals distinguish life. The consecration of common relations, things, tasks, duties, and vicissitudes, is that on which we should set our desire: herein, diligently improved, the soul finds its highest education, its choicest treasure.

4. *Day by day let us do all the good we can.*—What a source of sanctification is the life of service! The apostle Paul, the writer of our text,

was intent on serving his generation, and day by day sought strength for such action, regarding his work as a source of personal renewal. His life was one of unceasing prayer and unwearied devotion to evangelistic toil. Let us not put our trust in the red-letter day, the big donation, the impassioned revival, the rare opportunity, or the historical episode; let us cultivate the habit of daily helpfulness even in the most modest things. In one of her letters Miss Havergal writes: "The bits of wayside work are very sweet. Perhaps the *odd* bits, when all is done, will really come to more than the seemingly greater pieces!—the chance conversations with rich and poor, the seed sown in odd five minutes, even the *tables d'hôte* for me and the rides and friends' tables for you." This simple, colourless way of doing good is worth considering. We clamour for large opportunities, which are rarely, if ever, granted, missing meanwhile the little openings of daily life. This doing good in a small way at every opportunity makes many rich who could never have figured on the muster-roll of heroes or shone in the glorious army of martyrs. "No day without its line" was the canon of the great painter of antiquity; and thus, one by one, his masterpieces came to perfec-

tion. Let our motto be: "No day without its helpful word and deed, however obscure our sphere"; and we too in the kingdom of souls shall turn out masterpieces which no artist in marble or colour may rival.

A distinguished writer on natural phenomena observes, "In the husbandry of Nature there are no fallows." Left to herself, the energy of Nature knows no break, she permits no gaps, but unweariedly throws up successive harvests of fruits and flowers. So ought it to be with the growth of the soul and the growths of the soul. There is no discontinuity in the action of the Holy Spirit, and there ought to be no chasms of dullness and infertility in our experience. "In that day: A vineyard of wine, sing ye unto it. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." The Spirit acts upon us without intermission; there is no day, no hour, in which we are not subjects of His gracious influence. Let us then beware lest any barren interval should be created by our caprice, unbelief, or sloth. Let each day's faithfulness secure each day's unfailing gifts of grace and blessing.

In the making of many things a pause is fatal.

The glowing metal on the anvil will not brook the smith's caprice; the moistened clay under the potter's hand will not permit delay; when the gold is in the furnace the goldsmith must not play fast and loose. The utmost alertness and continuousness are imperative, or the thing is spoiled in the making. Is there not a truth here to be laid to heart touching the sanctification of our being? Will not the days of indifference and suspended devotion tell on our soul's welfare—nay, may they not put it in deadly peril?

If we renew our strength day by day, we shall know no ageing. To die daily and to live daily solve the problem of immortality. The years shall only purge our vision and reveal more glorious things; they shall render our ears more acute to catch whispers we now miss; they shall bow the body, but give wings to the spirit. We grow younger, ever younger, as "the inward man is renewed day by day."

III

REGRETFUL REVERIE

Forgetting the things which are behind.—PHILIPPIANS iii. 13.

A WHILE ago the *Lancet* contained an article under the title of "The First Lesson of Scientific Education," which sought to expose the folly of wasting mental tissue and energy in useless regrets. "The man who hunts yesterday's hare over again, or who dwells upon yesterday's letter, or who, by what our neighbours felicitously call *esprit d'escalier*, suffers his thoughts to linger upon the more effective manner in which it might have been possible to terminate last week's interview, is giving his substance in exchange for that which is nought. He is squandering his nerve-cells in a fashion which can yield him no return, and which not only by so much diminishes his power of using them fruitfully in other directions, but also, in all probability, converts some portion of the waste into material of a more or less toxic character. The

first lesson of scientific education should be that a man's brain-cells are not only money but capital, and that it is just as possible to dissipate them foolishly as to use them in the work of building up a career."

A pertinent and valuable lesson, indeed, in regard to our religious and moral development! Too many of us are guilty of wasting energy of mind and heart upon mistakes, or supposed mistakes, in the spiritual life, as others waste power in unavailing regrets concerning mental and social indiscretions and infelicities. We suffer our thoughts to linger on the maladroit handling of an affair which, had it been discreetly treated, would have displayed more entirely the Christian spirit, and proved of advantage to all concerned; we reflect upon our inexplicable lack of imagination in failing to grasp the full significance of a gracious situation or occurrence; we deplore the neglect of a propitious moment; we grieve over our lack of recollection, absence of tact, or want of promptitude; we brood over the blunders, sins, and sorrows of past years, all of which might have been averted, and which would not be repeated had we to live life over again; upon a thousand such memories we morbidly muse

until little spirit is left in us. We see now how we might have spoken so much more wisely, acted so much more becomingly, and brood over the awkwardness and fault until we lose caste in our own eyes and wax truly miserable. This hunting of yesterday's hare is the peculiar snare of sensitive souls with high ideals.

It is to small advantage that we exhaust ourselves in this ghostly sport. Nothing seems to promise more, and yet as a matter of fact nothing yields less, than does regretful reverie. The notion entertained is, that by living over again in meditation the erring and perverse episodes of the past we gain in knowledge and prudence; but we may rest assured that the loss involved by inordinate retrospect is beyond the profit. According to the medical testimony just adduced, mental fret about the past is only enervating. He "who suffers his thoughts to linger upon the more effective manner in which it might have been possible to terminate last week's interview is giving his substance in exchange for that which is nought." The rememorations of the frailties of our Christian life, the calling up again yesterday's omissions and bunglings, is a similar expenditure of precious power in fruitless friction. No nourish-

ment is gained by chewing that bitter cud. But this is only half the case; for the raking up of the disagreeable incidents of the past is not merely useless, it is positively pernicious, and that in a high degree. He who suffers his thoughts to linger upon the more effective manner in which he might have acted last week "is squandering his nerve-cells in a fashion which can yield him no return, and which, not only by so much diminishes his power of using them fruitfully in other directions, but also, in all probability, converts some portion of the waste into material of a more or less toxic character." The physician declares that vexatious remembrances incontinently indulged convert vital tissue and force into poison. The analogous fact in the spiritual life is yet more serious. In all the hours of idle regret and vain lamentation in which the godly indulge themselves, a process of secretion is going on in which the soul is debauched and poisoned by the foul stuff of melancholy, remorse, self-scorn, and despair. In every way this mental resuscitation of the unhappy passages of bygone days is unhealthy and dangerous. It spoils the joy of life; it discourages, exhausts, paralyses. The great poet who understood so profoundly and expressed so accurately the secret

workings of the human heart has in a fine passage exposed the vanity of the backward look:

When remedies are past, the griefs are ended,
By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended,
To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
Is the next way to draw new mischief on.
The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief;
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

Surely the religious world saps its strength and tortures itself more distressfully with painful memories and forebodings than is done in any other sphere. Recently M. Albert Vandal, of the French Academy, eulogized a distinguished family because "it had lived with its time and never shut itself up in the mausoleum of its souvenirs and its regrets." What this orator reprobated is what hosts of pious persons do. They fail to realize the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free from the dead past. What between rankling regrets for yesterday and doubts for tomorrow, many Christians spend life between the devil and the deep sea.

If we *will* look into the past, let us cherish the pleasures of memory rather than nurse its pangs.

Returning from a long journey in foreign lands, we soon forget the inconveniences and mis-

eries it entailed: its poetry and romance chiefly abide in our recollection. The laws of the mind are sane and their unhindered working gracious; and whilst irritations and fatigues are almost immediately forgotten, or converted into pleasant-ries, the images of purple sea, sunny skies, vine-clad hills, snow-decked summits, and ancient cities grow more vivid and engaging with the lapse of time. It is only the mystery of iniquity which perverts this benign action in the religious life, and gives predominance to harassing memories. Let us, then, seek to allow the memory its natural play so far as concerns the pilgrimage of the soul. Think of the redeeming love that rescued from the City of Destruction, the strengthening grace that has sustained our steps, the providential guidance that has kept us in the way, and the mighty power that has screened our head in battle and to this hour made us able to bear the burden and heat of the day. Along the course from the very starting-post Heaven has dropped sweet flowers and golden boons. These are the memories to retain. If we picture past tribulations, let us recall the grace that softened and sanctified them. And should we persist in indulging in reminiscences of errors and humiliations, let us praise God that we have

the consciousness of personal imperfection, which is infinitely better than self-complacency. "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect." The sense of failure is the shadow of a great ideal, a great effort, and a great hope. *This* retrospect will waste no power, nor work in any-wise to the poisoning of the soul; it will only refresh, vivify, and rejoice.

Our main concern, however, is with what lies beyond. The racer gains little by glances over his shoulder; his wisdom is to keep in view the goal and the wreath. All our strength is needed to build up character, to fulfil manifold duty, to prepare to see the face of God; and we cannot afford to waste power in futile regrets and gloomy reverie. By looking above and beyond we conserve and augment the precious inspirations and energies which build up and secure the inheritance of the sanctified. We must closely watch the introspective and the retrospective view; they alike easily pass into error and issue in mischief: but the upward gaze of faith, the onward glance of hope, can bring only blessing. Let us not linger tracing in the stepping-stones of our dead selves fossil faults; rather let us boldly and confidently mount to happier levels. Leave the past with

God; He knows best how to deal with it. Looking unto Jesus, let us press on to perfection.

Forward! be our watchword,
Steps and voices joined;
Seek the things before us,
Not a look behind.

IV

THE ROYAL DEBT

Giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.—EPHESIANS v. 20 (R. V.).

I *THE Spirit of Thankfulness ought to be the temper of our Whole Life—"giving thanks always for all things."*

1. God *merits* our thanks, if such an expression may be allowed. Our very being is His wondrous gift. "He has made us, and not we ourselves." The things which gladden and go to the enrichment and perfecting of life are His gifts. We are co-workers with Him in realizing various blessings which spring out of the earth, but in the profoundest sense it is still true that whatever we gather is of His bounty. "So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." And as He is the supreme Giver, so is He the source of *all* our blessing. Scherer* indulges in this strange re-

* *Essays on English Literature.*

flection: "In a certain sense paganism is more religious than Christianity, and associates the Deity with every act of human life more naturally and more of necessity. From the very fact that it has gods for everything—for the domestic hearth, for love, for marriage, for fighting—there is not a circumstance in which these gods have not a *locus standi*. . . . It is by no means the same with the moderns, in whom the much more exalted but much vaguer idea of divine providence has replaced the crowd of special deities." Is this so? Does the pagan more naturally and more of necessity associate the Deity with every act of human life because the Deity is recognized by him in a crowd of idols? Is it more artificial and perplexing to associate the One with everything? Has our sense of divine providence become more vague because we have replaced that polytheism which found a thousand deities presiding over a thousand spheres by the one true and living God whose solemn presence pervades all spheres, and whose wisdom, power, and love are expressed in all things and events? Surely not! The ancients fancied that each star was ruled by a special angel; have we therefore a vaguer sense of the government of the universe because we have come

to recognize that one law of gravitation obtains everywhere? The modern view alike of the natural and of the spiritual government of the world is far more lucid than any which obtained in the pagan world. "There is one God, and none other but He"; and without bewilderment we behold His wisdom and faithfulness revealed everywhere, and yield Him undivided reverence and love. "Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." Our thought and affection are not divided amongst gods many and lords many, but are concentrated on Him.

2. God *expects* our thanks. We cannot believe that the living God is indifferent to the spirit in which His boons are accepted. Our nature teaches us better. He whom we worship is not the great machinist, chemist, or artist—such a being might be insensible to gratitude; but we give thanks "to God, even the Father," and it is impossible to think that love and gratitude have no place in our relation to Him. "We are His offspring," and we are not insensible to gratitude. Wordsworth writes:

I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning.

This may mean that when common acts of kindness or courtesy call forth outbursts of gratitude, the donor is saddened to think how entirely forlorn and destitute must be the lot of those so deeply moved by a trifle; but it certainly does not mean that noble natures are indifferent to appreciation, or that they are offended by it. The finer the nature of men and the higher the relationships existing between them, the more place is found for gratitude, the more constant and delightful are its manifestations, and the more keenly is its lack deplored. We might readily suppose that Shakespeare had expressed the sense of ingratitude too strongly—

I hate ingratitude more in a man
Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,
Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption
Inhabits our frail blood.

But when we consider the place assigned by St. Paul to thanklessness, the poet's insight is strangely justified. "Knowing God, they glorified Him not as God, neither gave thanks." Then follows

the terrible catalogue of the vices and crimes of the pagan world. The apostle discerned in their lack of godly sensibility and appreciation the source and sign of all the black vintage which provoked the divine wrath. The same great lesson is taught, the same order observed, in the Second Epistle to Timothy, "unthankful, unholy" (iii. 2), and this order is associated with a long list of profanities, passions, and trespasses.

Sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child;

and "God, even the Father," is grieved by the insensibility of His children whom He has loaded with benefits. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me"; and as we fulfill this delightful duty life is pervaded by a holy joy. "Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely." Thankfulness is ever close kin to music.

II. *This Spirit of Thankfulness is Possible only in the Grace and Power of Jesus Christ.* "Giving thanks always for all things *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The name of Christ is that general and holy element, as it were, in which everything is to be received, to be enjoined,

to be done, and to be suffered. The spirit of the natural man is the spirit of criticism and depreciation. Ingratitude was the sin of the Jew. We have just seen that it was the sin of the Gentile; and ingratitude is still the root sin of the race. Walking through the summer landscape fills us with delight at the abundance and richness of the world: everywhere the flowers spring in beauty, the grass grows upon the mountains, the fields are sprinkled with flocks, the orchards teem with ripeness, the valleys sing with corn; the spectacles of nature leave upon our mind the impression of unspeakable beauty, of manifold riches, of overflowing abundance. In the presence of such opulence and splendour it might be supposed that every spectator would be inspired with wonder and delight. But the agricultural journals tell another story. There we read of excessive heat and unseasonable cold, of too much or too little rain; the ears of corn are large, only there is nothing in them; a great deal of straw, but deficient in the head; pretty good in the ear, sadly wanting, however, in straw; barley is specially disappointing; potatoes show signs of disease; the early frosts quite spoiled the orchards, the fruits of which will hardly be worth gathering; fungoid and insect in-

juries, rust, smut, and blight are playing dreadful havoc; some things ripen prematurely, whilst others do not ripen at all; there is serious disease among cattle; and "this is the worst year the farmer has ever known," concludes the annual dirge. It is almost impossible to believe that this can be a description of the same rich world that we looked upon with such delight. So we take up the parable from generation to generation, responding to God's generous earth and vitalizing sky with criticism and reproach. Dowered with treasures of light and darkness, inheriting a large and wealthy place, the language of discontent is our native speech.

Let us see, then, how in the Christian life these infinite repinings are changed into praise.

1. The truth and grace of Jesus Christ make thankfulness possible by *convincing us of our true position before God*. Ingratitude, in the main, arises out of infinite and inveterate conceit. Wonderful as this world is, we cherish a secret conviction that we deserve one a great deal better. In the sense of our vast importance we despise most things. Satisfied that we are worthy of the greatest of God's gifts, we really appreciate none. Here the truth of the gospel effects

a fundamental change; it convinces us that we are sinners, without merit and rights, and in doing this gives a new standpoint whence we view the whole field of life. Said Jacob on the day that his conscience awoke and he knew himself to be guilty of insincerity, covetousness, and fraud, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant"; and men can never appreciate the riches of life until they have stood where Jacob did on that memorable day, conscious of his folly and sin, and thus perceiving every blessing to be a *mercy*, a *sparing* mercy. In Psalm lxxv. the same order is observed: "Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away. Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts." The sense of sin and its forgiveness comes first, then follows the glowing appreciation of the world: "Thou visitest the earth and waterest it: Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God. . . . Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness; and Thy paths drop fatness." The Parable of the Prodigal Son teaches the same lesson. The youth fails to appreciate the precious things of his father's house until he has felt the

wickedness of his conduct, the bitterness of self-will, and known that he was not worthy to be called a son. In Christ we thoroughly learn this essential lesson. He convinces men of sin, righteousness, and of judgment; and having done this, He has abased our pride and prepared us to rejoice in all things. The sense of merit has gone; everything is understood as the free gift of God, the gift of pure mercy; we consciously deserve nothing, we are therefore thankful for everything. Chrysostom goes so far as to say, "We are to thank God for hell." We may safely thank Him for keeping us out of it; and realizing that we have been saved from the lowest hell, we find abundant cause for joy and thanksgiving wherever we may be and whatever may be our fortune. A pardoned criminal is not in haste to find fault with the world beyond the prison gates; putting off the convict's garb, he does not stipulate for purple; released from a cell, the lowliest home is palatial; after the treadmill any work is light; and the plainest fare is toothsome to one who has had a rope round his neck. All unthankfulness arises in an imperfect sense of sin and peril; but he who in any adequate degree knows the preciousness of the salvation of Christ rejoices in God with ex-

ceeding joy, and in whatever it may please Him to give. Our personal unworthiness is then sharply contrasted with God's gifts poured down upon us in crowded succession, and their glory shines forth like stars against a dark sky.

2. Christ makes thankfulness possible *through restoring in us the spiritual faculty by which we discern the greatness and sweetness of all things.* The more intellectual that men are, the more vividly do they appreciate the aspects of Nature, even those which are most obscure. A rare faculty enables them to discern the glory hidden from the multitude. Solomon "spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall." Everybody saw the cedar; it required Solomon to do justice to the despised weed in the crannied wall. When Linnæus visited England and for the first time saw the gorse in blossom, he was overwhelmed by the sight, and falling on his knees glorified God. Kew Gardens will hardly kindle ordinary souls, but the wild plant of the common threw the great naturalist into ecstasy. Darwin wrote a delightful book on the earthworm. Most people avoid the lowly creature as "a dirty thing"; yet the greatest man of the

generation perceived the wonderful character and magnificent work of the despised creature and became its poet-laureate. Ruskin wrote a lovely volume on "The Ethics of the Dust," discovering the marvellous virtues and the glorious poetry of the clods of the valley. Genius shows itself and its transcendence by discerning the grandeur, romance, and joy of all things, great or small.

The Spirit of Christ creates in us a faculty of spiritual appreciation corresponding to genius in the mental realm. He endows with the vision, sensibility, and power which enable us richly to enjoy. "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." He bestows that purity of heart, that profound insight into God's gifts and ways, that alertness and responsiveness of spirit, which enable His disciples to see what other men do not see, and to realize in all things the eternal faithfulness and love which constitute the essential glory and blessedness of life. It is thus that we understand the touching thankfulness of the godly poor and deeply afflicted who possess the very least of worldly treasure and natural enjoyment. Some of these find more delight in a humble cottage and broken victuals than millionaires know in palaces.

They possess the strange gift that Solomon, Linnaeus, Darwin, and Ruskin possessed in the intellectual world, and they do not need large and extraordinary things to provoke their wonder and gratitude. They find rapture in the Master's face, and the crumbs which fall from His table are bread enough and to spare.

What many of us need is a richer spirituality to understand the deep meanings of this worldly life, so that we may find in each new gift a theme for a new song. He who knows most fully the heavenly blessing of purity and hope knows best the height and length and depth and breadth of the things of time and sense. We fail to appreciate the lower world because we do not live enough in the highest. The "unspeakable gift" is the key to all other gifts. We get at the natural only through the supernatural, and he who is full of love and hope makes a "Hallelujah Chorus" out of the veriest scrap of material or social blessing.

3. Christ makes the habit of thankfulness possible by *assuring us that the painful things of life serve equally with the brightest*. "In everything give thanks." The "all things" must not be limited to agreeable things. We remember hearing a

preacher discourse on this subject of thankfulness, who mainly sought to excite our gratitude by dwelling on the fact that whilst many about us were sick, blind, deaf, and friendless, we enjoyed health, vision, hearing, and friends. This will not do. What will the poor, afflicted, and bereaved say? The doctrine of thankfulness must be wide enough to take in all the sons and daughters of sorrow and disadvantage. Such, indeed, is the teaching of the New Testament. It affirms that the adversities of life serve the highest ends equally with the golden gifts of fortune. "Everything has His love in it, upon or below the surface." Pearls present many shades of colour; but the most valuable of these gems are said to be the black ones which are occasionally found. So is it with human life: the dark events are not less pearls than are the white, rosy, and golden things of our prosperity; and we may well believe also that sometimes the black pearls are the most precious. Therefore is it possible for us rationally to give thanks always in all things. "The noble army of martyrs praise Thee."

How poor some of us are in the spirit of thankfulness! The warmest thing we can utter is, "Well, I don't think that I have much to complain

of." Wonderful concession! What saints we are! We must get higher than this, a long way beyond this, into awe, wonder, love, and worship.

"Forget not all His benefits." Life is like a railway journey through a lovely country. All the summer day the landscape swims past, and at night we just remember a fairy dell that caught our eye, a gleam of silvery river, a flowery bank, a solemn forest, a stretch of gold, and that is about all. So at best we remember only a few of the precious things which have been ours as we fledged on from youth to years. "Forget not all His benefits." We are not expected to remember all, but let us not forget them all. We cannot number all the stars in our sky and call them by their names, yet the reflections of some of the shining things ought to be photographed in our memory. We are unable to recollect all the flowers which have kissed our feet; but we can pluck a few now and then, here and there, and put them into the book of our remembrance as souvenirs of the beauty and fragrance which have been ours. We cannot recall all the treasures of the deep along whose shore we have travelled; but we can keep a few pearly shells which retain the echoes of the vast music of the ocean of the eternal love.

Let our eyes be ever open to behold the goodness of the Lord. Let us cherish that greatest of gifts—a thankful heart. Let the praises of the Most High be continually on our lips. And sometimes let us hope that the sense of the eternal love will compel us to silence and tears, which is the grandest tribute of all. “And Elisha called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground; and she took up her son, and went out.” Not a word of thanks! It was not a time for words, only for expressive silence, for looks of infinite meaning, for swimming eyes, nay, for emotions too deep for tears. So, lost in wonder and love, let us adore Him who has remembered us in our low estate, who giveth grace and glory and withholdeth no good thing.

V

TEMPERAMENTAL LIMITATIONS

And I said, This is my infirmity.—PSALM lxxvii. 10.

WE usually think that the world around us is the chief arena in which we fight the battle of life, but really our greatest difficulty is with ourselves. Our constitutional temper and bias are chief factors, and they very largely determine what our special trouble shall be, alike as to its nature and measure. The things of the outside world which exercise us are conditioned by our peculiar temperament; their colour and magnitude are less in themselves than in our own mind; some are indifferent to that which causes intense anxiety to others, one minimises what another magnifies. Our surroundings receive a very different interpretation according as we are timid or confident, sanguine or moody, sensitive or callous. And quite independently of circumstances, our individual moods and susceptibilities occa-

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sion us endless agitation and painfulness, our thoughts accusing or else excusing. In this respect also the heart knoweth its own bitterness, with which a stranger may not intermeddle. Obscure physical and psychic causes are more influential in the determination of our thoughts and feelings than are the things and events which appeal to our senses and make up our worldly history. Well may Jules Lemaitre write: "The body has a character as complex and as difficult to comprehend as the moral character whereof it is the translation and the symbol."

Feebleness of constitution is a limitation of which many are painfully conscious. Frailty of physique prevents them doing much they desire to do, and more or less spoils what they contrive to accomplish. When Henry Ward Beecher was admonished to take care of his health, he replied, "I have already more than I know what to do with." Numbers of excellent people are free from that perplexity. Without being laid aside from active life, they suffer from a lack of force which makes their daily task much of a burden, and duty rarely a delight. The faintness, irregularity, and unsatisfactoriness which mar the service and workmanship of really conscientious persons may

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often be traced to constitutional lassitude. They do not fulfil their promise, they are strangely unequal and disappointing, they start well and finish feebly, their work always lacks those last touches of power which mean perfection, the outline and purpose are beyond the picture, in everything they are spasmodic and ineffective. This is not primarily an intellectual defect. The mental powers of these patients are lucid and robust enough; they can see as clearly as any one the shortcomings of their efforts. Nor is it a moral defect. They lack neither conscience nor will, although oftentimes grievously misjudged. The absence of that constitutional force of which Beecher had more than he knew what to do with is the true and sufficient explanation of their failure. Robert Louis Stevenson writes to a correspondent: "I was much pleased with what you send about my work. Ill-health is a great handicapper in the race. I have never at command that press of spirits that are necessary to strike out a thing red-hot. *Silverado* is an example of stuff worried and pawed about, often in poor health, and you can see for yourself the result: good pages, an imperfect fusion, a certain languor of the whole—not, in short, Art." Bodily, congenital infirmity reduces to ineffectual

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strivings what in conception and purpose was bold and noble. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

A controversy has recently been carried on touching the relation of muscular strength and culture to the perfection of the violinist. One party argued that muscular culture prejudices the musician, spoiling his suppleness and delicacy of touch, and they adduced the fact that several of the greatest performers were men of frail physique and bad health. The weight of argument was, however, altogether with the disputants on the other side, who contended that although a few sickly but inspired individuals like Paganini attain greatness in their art, yet physical soundness and training must, as a rule, constitute the basis of superb musical skill: one of the greatest living violinists declaring that he finds it absolutely necessary to keep the organs of the body in a healthy and disciplined condition. We may be sure that in all vocations bodily soundness and vitality play an immense and essential part in the accomplishment of men's calling and purpose. Here, then, many find the crux of life. They see clearly, feel keenly, propose magnificently, but their defect of native power is that of the butterfly unable to

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struggle out of the cocoon. The sense of weariness, irresolution, and procrastination which distresses certain noble souls is altogether unsuspected by their companions of a more virile temperament. Resolute spirits surprise us by the wonders that can be wrought with frail mechanism, but thousands know by painful experience that a deficiency of native force has marred their whole life, spoiling thoughts, faculties, opportunities, and purposes which a flush of animal spirits would have converted into splendid activity and achievement.

Intensity of constitution is the infirmity of others. Most of us have acquaintances who are invariably and almost alarmingly vehement in speech and action; they flash in ordinary talk, and discharge routine business with explosive energy; they live at the utmost tension, and every accent and gesture express intensity. Science has recently discovered that our hive-bees exhaust themselves prematurely in abnormal industry; they are not native to this country and climate, and not having as yet completely adapted themselves to a new environment, they needlessly expend an amount of force which involves their premature destruction. We see the same waste

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of power in certain human lives which do not so much burn out as blaze out. They put as much fire into a letter as an average author does into a book; they sparkle and storm in a chat like an impassioned orator at a crisis; throughout ordinary life they act as upon a stage, and are as intense and dramatic as a tragedian, only they experience all he simulates. To restrain themselves, to check their rage, seems very proper and desirable, but expostulation in the main is a counsel of perfection. Temperament yields little to argument. The Pacific Ocean may chide the Atlantic for its tempestuousness, and the Atlantic retort on the stagnation of the Pacific, yet each remains true to its character; and when Mont Blanc begs Vesuvius to keep cool, and the mount that burns with fire scorches the Alpine height for its inhospitable cold, the temperature of neither is altered by a degree. Just as seas and mountains are for profound reasons what they are, and remain unchanged despite all criticism, so the bias of the soul is inevitable, and little good comes of mutual recrimination. We can no more change our constitutional qualities than the colour of our eyes. Many are the sorrows of the fiery soul. Too often the body is fretted and consumed, as elec-

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tricity on occasion burns the wire that conducts it. The mind of the impulsive suffers terrible reactions and despondencies. And morally the ardent temper is attended by singular temptations and perils, serious mistakes and bitter regrets, of which colder natures know nothing. To live on the nerve is a purgatorial life.

The *hyper-sensitive* constitution is an organ of martyrdom. A few of our friends are exempt from this affliction. From youth upward they are confident and self-sufficient, aggressive and invulnerable. They feel competent to rewrite Shakespeare, to add another hue to Rubens' rainbow, to give Kubelik a wrinkle on the violin, and to correct St. Paul. Strangers to any kind of shrinking, it might seem that Nature had dowered them with an extra skin. How different it is with others! Cowper represents a host of morbidly shy and sensitive souls. They resemble travellers with bare feet on a path of briars. Easily wounded, with an acute sense of their own deficiency, alive to every slight and wrong, and with a vivid sympathy with all forms of suffering, they seem as though they had been born short of a skin and doomed to agonies of which the ordinary man is altogether unconscious, or to which he is practi-

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cally indifferent. God alone knows what these neurotic, nervous, shrinking souls suffer in a rough world like this.

Only One knows all the mysteries of our personality. How profoundly illuminative and assuring are the words of the psalmist concerning the mystery of the individual soul, when we consider them in the light of our modern knowledge of embryology and heredity, of the origins and complexity of our physical and psychic life! "For Thou hast possessed my reins : Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee ; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made ; marvellous are Thy works ; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect ; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." In that vast mysterious underworld God dwelt ; in its thickest gloom He worked as in the light ; His forming hand gave the soul its bias ; and the most occult secrets of our personality are familiar to Him. He alone understands His children. Let us seek in His

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grace the strength to deal with the special need and peril of our nature. He can impart a force to the will of the feeble that shall more than compensate for inimical bodily conditions; He can endow the impulsive with a saving instinct; and the easily-wounded, weeping in secret places, He can effectually soothe. He can so discipline us that our very defects and excesses shall yield a completer perfection and beauty. "And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."

VI

THE COLLAPSES OF LIFE

Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is my grief, and I must bear it. My tent is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they are not; there is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains.—JEREMIAH x. 19, 20 (R. V.).

For in the day of trouble He shall keep me secretly in His pavilion: in the covert of His tent shall He hide me; He shall lift me up upon a rock.—PSALM xxvii. 5 (R. V.).

I *THE Lament of the Prophet.*—"Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous. Truly this is my grief." It was not an irritation, inconvenience, or annoyance, a disagreeable, disappointing incident, as so many of our troubles are: it was a bitter grief, a crushing overthrow.

The overthrow is *total*. "My tent is spoiled, and all my cords are broken." Many times had the land of Israel been devastated and its population subjected to loss and suffering; on this occasion the catastrophe was to be overwhelming.

Thus from time to time is it with the individual. It is nothing new that our tents are injured—a pillar is snapped, a cord unloosed, a curtain torn; yet ever and anon the tent is utterly overthrown, it is left a heap, nothing but fragments, memories, shadows survive. Sometimes adverse financial fortune wrecks our tent. Our rich and happy home is abruptly broken up. Victor Hugo describes a wonderful tent given to Napoleon by the Sultan Selim: "From the outside it appeared like an ordinary tent, remarkable only for having in the canvas little windows, of which the frames were of rope, three windows on each side. The inside was superb. The visitor found himself inside a great chest of gold brocade; upon this brocade were flowers and a thousand fancy devices. On looking closely into the cords of the windows one discovered that they were of the most magnificent gold and silver lace; each window had its awning of gold brocade; the lining of the tent was of silk, with large red-and-blue stripes. If I had been Napoleon, I should have liked to place my iron bed in this tent of gold and flowers, and to sleep in it on the eve of Wagram, Jena, and Friedland." Metaphorically speaking, Napoleon did dwell in a magnificent tabernacle, but he did

not abide there; on the eve of Waterloo he slept in it for the last time, after when the whole fabric fell into awful ruin. Napoleon III. shared a similar fortune. On the eve of Sedan he slept for the last time in his glorious imperial tent, then the splendid pavilion vanished like a dream.

We continually see rich and illustrious men reduced to poverty at a stroke—their heirlooms scattered, their estates alienated, their pictures knocked down at auction, their palaces becoming the dwelling-places of strangers. And this kind of thing is ever going on. Crops are spoiled, ships founder, property is unlet, tariffs close mills and factories, fires consume, clerks embezzle, stocks and shares tumble down, and lovely tents lie scattered. We behold these startling reverses writ large in fallen conquerors, exiled kings, and bankrupt millionaires; but in a humbler way financial embarrassment overtakes thousands, and levels their tabernacles with the sand. Sometimes the calamity that surprises us is the total failure of our health. We continually deal successfully with one ailment or another; the day, however, arrives when we must look the fact in the face that the clay tenement is shaken to its foundations. Our health, that of our dear friends, is radically

impaired, and with sinking heart we contemplate inevitable decay and dissolution. We survive many storms, but at length one bursts that does not spare a rag; it is utter desolation, it lays us and our hopes in the dust.

The overthrow is *sudden*. A tent in the wilderness is broken without warning, and herein is the symbol of our overthrows. We speak of coming events casting their shadows before: tremendous events supervene with little warning. The most desolating bolts shoot out of a blue sky, the spectre of ruin is ambushed in broad sunshine and takes us unawares. Science has invented a whole system of warning touching the disturbances and calamities of Nature. The seismograph is an alarum proclaiming the stealthy steps of earthquake and volcano. Weather charts inform concerning cyclonic disturbances. A variety of sensitive barometers indicate atmospheric variations, and thus the mariner and miner are warned of impending peril. But no instruments are fine enough to detect the approach of the tempests and earthquakes which wreck human fortunes, no storm-drum warns us into safe harbours.

The things we greatly fear surprise us; sudden destruction overtakes us. We stand in jeopardy

every hour ; very faint is our hold on earthly treasure and bliss. How soon the splendour of a great nation may be smitten and vanish ! "And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, wherein were made rich all that had their ships in the sea by reason of her costliness ! for in one hour is she made desolate." The mightiest empire shapes itself into a cloud and vanishes away. With what alarming abruptness are families plunged into gloom ! "It is terrible how quickly a human landscape, all-gilded meadow, silver river, and blue sky, can cloud and darken." And the pleasant lot and radiant hopes of the individual are dashed with tragic suddenness. The splendour of a garden of many colours delights us ; but unexpectedly falls a frost, a killing frost, and the eye faints at the sight of blackened foliage and drooping blooms. All is thin air, unsubstantial and precarious, however it may affect the aspects of permanence, and it breaks up in the twinkling of an eye ; it is such stuff as dreams are made of. We can guarantee nothing but uncertainty. Any day our whole world is changed as by black magic. "Thou carriest them away as with a flood ; they are as a sleep ; in the morning

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they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth."

The overthrow is *irreparable*. "There is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains." The prophet foresaw no prince, warrior, statesman, or patriot able to save the State, to retrieve its shattered fortunes, to gather its outcasts. The crushing blow denied the hope of national recovery. This order of calamity is repeated in private life. Usually the losses of life admit of ameliorations; but some deprivations are complete, some losses final. The physical maladies which overtake us prove incurable. The earthly tabernacle trembles beneath a mortal blow; it may not fall at once, yet we are conscious that its fate is sealed. Death's bony fingers are cunningly unloosing the scarlet cords, and silently by day and night he saps the ivory pillars of our tabernacle. The physicians are helpless, the deep secrets of their science and the skill of their hand are in vain, "there is none to stretch forth" the sinking tent "any more, and to set up its curtains." Many financial disasters are irremediable. As a rule, perhaps, stricken tents may be renewed, in some degree at least, even when they may not be

restored to their original spaciousness and glory; but tabernacles are continually falling which can never be rebuilt. It is extremely pathetic to see the aged who have known better days attempting with thin hands to restore the fabric of their shattered fortune; to watch the sanguine veteran as he essays to do over again the work of life, and desperately struggles to put up once more his old tent with its gold, brocade, and flowers. It can never be. In William Morris a disappointed hero is encouraged:—

Behold to-morrow comes, and thou art young,
Nor on one string are all life's jewels strung.

But many of us are not young, to-morrow is not ours; the last string on which life's jewels were beaded is broken, and it is vain to attempt their recovery. Some bereavements, again, are without consolation. Who can bring our dead to life or atone for their absence? The lovely, prized tabernacle is hidden in the clods, and our text supplies the epitaph: "There is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains." We must look the fact in the face that the day approaches when we shall be totally helpless, when nothing can be done, and everything must be endured.

The overthrow is *personal*. "Truly this is *my* grief, and *I* must bear it." We live in a world of misfortunes and sorrows; but, as a rule, they do not greatly affect us: they occur in distant places, they affect strangers. One day, however, the calamity comes right home, and the arrow drinks up our spirit. "It is *my* grief." *My* country is humiliated; *my* fortune lost; *my* son, *my* daughter, *my* husband, *my* wife, is snatched away; *my* glory and treasure, life and joy, prize and hope, are ruthlessly torn from me, and I am bereft and desolate. As Helen McKenny expresses it: "The story of human life is ever the same, though told in new versions and in differing climes. Things go on smoothly with us for years, and we never can believe that the 'trouble' we are 'born to' will some day overtake us. But the hour strikes, and the bounds are removed; the floodgates are opened, and in upon us pours the full, devastating tide of sorrow. Not a new experience in this world of sin and suffering, yet strangely new and terrible to us. We sit in dumb desolation in the midst of our 'spoiled tabernacle.' Hearts which were one with ours are severed from us. It may be by death, or by something worse than death. We stand for the time in darkness, 'upon the shadow

side of God,' and see no light of comfort or of restoration. 'I must bear it,' says the stricken heart, with a wail." Oh! great is the grief under which the human spirit bleeds and faints. None ought to speak of it except those who have suffered in the depths. It is so awful and sacred that one must needs shrink from writing of it too intimately. As Charles Reade confesses, "There is a degree of anguish one shrinks of intruding upon too familiarly in person; and even on paper the microscope should spare sometimes these beatings of the bared heart."

II. *The Psalmist's Refuge*.—"For in the day of trouble He shall keep me secretly in His pavilion: in the covert of His tent shall He hide me." How deep, how real, how strong, ought the consolations to be which are offered to such sufferers as we have sought to describe! No rhetoric will suffice here, nor merely brave words. When your tent sinks away hopelessly there is a royal pavilion in which you may hide—this is the sublime direction and consolation of these precious words—something deeper than our grief, vaster than our sorrow.

Fly to *the living God*. Jeremiah, in the chapter whence our first text is taken, dwells upon the

reality and glory of the living God. "Forasmuch as there is none like unto Thee, O Lord : Thou art great, and Thy name is great in might." "But the Lord is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting King." "The molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors : in the time of their visitation they shall perish. The portion of Jacob is not like unto them : for He is the former of all things ; and Israel is the rod of His inheritance : the Lord of hosts is His name." This or cynicism, madness, despair. We refuse to believe that these earthly things called health and wealth and pleasure, these fading shapes, fleeting shadows, and dying echoes, the idols of the natural man, are the ultimate realities. We believe in the living God—all-wise, just, loving, keeping mercy for thousands who fear Him, and we trust in His perfect government and glorious purpose. When the idols perish in the time of their visitation, when the things of gold and pride and comfort are swept away at one fell stroke, He is left, and He will not fail us. In the dark and cloudy day we fall back on the eternal justice, love, and promise.

Alas for us if we have not this faith and hope !

The misery of scepticism, of intellectual doubt, worldliness, mental indolence, and moral inactivity consists in this—that men have to suffer cares, ill-health, impoverishments, and often the greater evils of life, without a calming prospect, without any hope that the wrong will be made right, the broken pieces joined into a perfect whole hereafter. As Symonds affirms, who writes as an independent thinker, and not as an orthodox believer: “If the world is to live without faith and to become conscious of the vanity of things—that is, if men take to thinking seriously upon the facts of this life without a religious trust in God—a simultaneous suicide might almost be expected. What people call pessimism—the philosophy of Schopenhauer, for example—implies and virtually professes this conclusion.” Whilst men are simply thinkers they may believe that they are captains of their soul and persuade themselves to another conclusion; but in days of inexorable misfortune and overwhelming distress, when humanity is shaken to its foundation, there is no alternative except faith in God or despair.

“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.” Grand refuge! Storms and earthquakes it defies; time does not sap its strength; no

destroyer can reach its foundations; thieves do not break through to steal nor conspirators to slay; the topmost wave of the deluge fell short of its threshold; burning worlds will not scorch it. *Our* tent has been riven, its tattered curtains flutter in the wind, it sinks into dust and ashes; but "Thou, Lord," art our all-encompassing tabernacle—

Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall *abide* under the shadow of the Almighty."

Out of Job's ashes I will call to Thee—
In spite of dead distrust call earnestly:—
Oh! Thou who livest, call, then answer dying me.

Let us seek the presence and grace of the Almighty in the *loving Saviour, the strong Son of God*. "The tabernacle of God is with men," and in this royal tent we may safely hide until the storm is overpast. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me"; the Greek signifying, as the

margin shows, That the strength of Christ may "cover me," "spread a tabernacle over me"; and enfolded in this divine tent the apostle was gloriously immune when the worst came to the worst. "Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake : for when I am weak, then am I strong." Beautiful figure! We are desolate, strengthless, hopeless, our tent carried away with the whirlwind ; but the divine strength and human sympathy of the living, present Saviour enfold us like the soft and ample curtains of a royal tent ; they are about us on every side, and keep us from the fear of evil. We never feel more the preciousness of the Incarnate God than we do in the day of fatalities, the hour of darkness and dereliction. Oh ! in a world of stricken hopes let us see that our "life is hid with Christ in God." That is the secret place of the Most High.

Anticipate *the heavenly home*. "For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." Let us so live that when this fugitive tent is abolished we may be ready for the fairer shrine which awaits the faithful. Walking in a church the

other day, I observed on a tablet this passage from the Psalms: "And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee." "And *now*, Lord." *Now*, when everything tangible is absolutely gone! "In days past," the dead man seemed to cry, "I had something to hold by. I had eyes to see, ears to hear, feet to run, hands to handle and fight, but now all my members are paralysed; I had gold and silver, but this shroud has no pockets; I had troops of friends, but lover and friend are put far from me. *Now*, Lord, what wait I for? Not a rag of my tent left, not a plank of my broken bark to cling to; it is now absolute ruin and despair, or absolute ruin and victory. My hope is in Thee." God will not confound us. From the edge of the abyss He will deliver us, and set us upon a rock. All our graces are perfected on some brink of ruin, and at the point of absolute destruction we awake to find beyond our fairest dreams.

VII

THE OBVIOUSNESS OF THE ESSENTIAL IN QUESTIONS OF FAITH

At that time Jesus answered, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.—MATTHEW xi. 25.

WHILST the spiritual rulers of the nation rejected our Lord, the unlearned and childlike people understood and accepted Him. This ought to be kept in vivid recollection by the Christian Church. The lurking thought of a necessary profundity and obscurity in saving truth ever waits to beguile and deceive spiritual teachers; and it is most desirable that we should again and again remind ourselves of the obviousness of what is essential in faith. This truth ought not to be lost sight of in biblical criticism. Such criticism in our day has attained immense proportions and great authority, and for much of it we may

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justly be thankful; yet the fact remains that the vital verities concerning God and His salvation lie on the very surface of revelation. The notion must not be allowed to possess us that it is only through scholarship and subtlety that men reach the secret of revelation. In California in the old days deep-level gold-mining was the fashion; it seemed reasonable to suppose that the gold must lie deep, and be difficult to acquire; yet, in the end, deep-level mining proved an expensive failure. A more careful exploration nearer the surface was then tried, and in almost every instance bodies of ore were found that had been overlooked in the eagerness to penetrate to unknown depths—the searchers missed the gold by getting below it. It is easy to fall into a similar mistake in our treatment of Holy Scripture. Here, too, the gold lies near the surface. The sensibility of sincerity secures to wayfaring men light, peace, and hope; whilst the acute, unsympathetic critic digs deep only to dig himself a grave. The British and Foreign Bible Society distributing the holy book without note or comment is amply justified by our Lord's words. Painstaking criticism and scholarly exegesis are in many ways helpful, yet the truth which saves is independent of both.

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The history of theology shows how the truth may be missed through yielding to the temptation of a pretentious profundity. Christian teachers elaborate stately systems of doctrine only at length to discover that they missed the mark through false notions of depth, and by going far afield for their analogies and arguments. To illustrate the character of God, to establish a reasonable theory of the atonement, to elucidate the philosophy of society, the old theologians brought forward the etiquette of thrones, the rites of temples, the principles and customs of judgment-halls, and the rules of commercial exchange; but after a thousand years of high debate these grand arguments and analogies prove unsatisfactory; and modern theologians, turning from the imperial, sacerdotal, forensic, and commercial, get their best insight into the supreme mysteries through studying the personal and domestic. The character of God, the method of the divine government, the philosophy of the atonement, and the secret of society, are manifested most convincingly in a father's compassion, a mother's love, a child's trust, a sister's devotion, a brother's faithfulness; these familiar images and relationships of the fire-side satisfy us far more than the grandiose images

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and explanations of the old divinity. Whilst sacred doctors and philosophers were seeking truth in the august, the classical, the remote, and complex, it was smiling upon them all the time from the hearthstone. Perhaps other dark enigmas may become transparent on the same spot. The gold is near the surface. "Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding." The childlike vision and expression are truest. Theology is a science, yet for the profoundest science simplest words suffice. The obscure may justly be regarded as the mark of the non-essential. Recently a complaint was made that a certain gathering for the promotion of personal holiness was suffering neglect. May not one cause of this neglect be found in the fact that the doctrine of entire sanctification has lost charm and power through being obscured by a cloud of subtle definitions and divorced from practical life? Wesley complains against himself on this score, and on one occasion wrote, "I have perhaps an exceedingly complex idea of sanctification, or a sanctified man." Yet his idea of sanctification was simplicity itself compared with the intricate, cloudy conceptions of some of his more recent disciples. If we are not cautious, we darken by defining; the

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history of heresy is the history of definitions. Let us be content to teach that perfected holiness means greatly ennobled character, and common virtues raised into uncommon perfection by the grace of the indwelling Spirit; and this once understood and proclaimed, gatherings for the promotion of holiness will possess a practical significance and an attractiveness that can never belong to mere verbal refinements and phrases. The obviousness of revelation must to the utmost be repeated in theology. The river of the water of life is as clear as crystal.

This obviousness of the saving truth is a fact to be remembered in evangelization. A distinguished divine is reported to have said, "It is hopeless to attempt the reformation of the lower classes of society unless the upper are first reformed." How does this agree with the record of the Master's ministry? The common people heard him gladly, and His experience brought home to Him the fact that what was hidden from the wise and prudent was revealed to babes. How does this statement, that the conversion of the upper classes must precede the conversion of the lower, agree with the history of primitive Christianity? Dr. Orr has sought to show that the in-

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fluence of Christianity on the higher ranks of society has been under-estimated, and that the membership of the early Church was not drawn mainly from the lowest, but from the intermediate classes, and embraced many of the wealthier and higher orders; yet the whole history of the primitive Church must be rewritten if we are to believe that the faith of Christ spread chiefly through the upper classes. How, again, is this waiting for the reformation of the aristocracy justified by the course of the Evangelical Revival? Not in the least. It has been observed that whilst intellectual movements descend from the upper classes to the lower, religious and moral movements ascend from the masses to the élite; and certainly the latter half of this generalization is confirmed by the history of the memorable revival of the eighteenth century. The people entered the kingdom of God before their nobles. The colliers of Kingswood did not wait for the gentry of Bath, nor the mobs of Moorfields for the reformation of the Members of the Houses of Parliament. The gracious truths of Christ appeal to the man in the street, and he may at once discern them to the saving of the soul; the dustman may as readily apprehend them as the duke, the illiterate as the

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scholar, the outcast as the honourable. Salvation does not filter through the upper strata of rank, genius, and opulence, down to the lower strata of illiteracy and labour; rather, as in Nature, the living water finds its way from the depth to the eminence. The gold, rubies, and precious stones of spiritual truth are scattered amongst us with an undistinguishing regard, and when the artless poor see them they know them. To preach the holiest truths to the masses is not to cast pearls before swine. We honour the illustrious in station and talent, but we cannot flatter them by believing that the conversion of the democracy waits on their reformation. The essential truth is on the surface, immediately available for the unsophisticated, whether rich or poor.

Yes, on the surface. It is time we did justice to that much-maligned surface. It is no doubt deeply interesting to get under the earth with the miner, to grope about the roots of things with the geologist; but when all is said, the surface of the earth is the main matter to the million. Here it is that the sun shines, that we breathe the sweet air; here the corn grows, the fruits ripen, the birds sing. The mere surface! The mere surface expresses the sum total of all that lies beneath it,

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as the spirit of man expresses itself in the sparkle of the eye and the bloom of his skin. It is thus with revelation. Let the intellectual sink shafts of logic, research, and mysticism as deep as they may, it is a necessity of reason that they should; yet the truths by which men live are on the surface, delightfully intelligible at a glance to the simple-hearted, the whole-hearted. This is the main matter to us all. George Macdonald scoffs at men "who dig for a sun within a garden fence." No need to dig for a sun shining in the heavens; all may see it; and its light is pleasant to every eye. Let us beware of the gnosticism and pedantry which would make Christian truth dark and distant, hard to be understood, the prerogative of an intellectual clique. The truths of revelation which some are pleased to regard as esoteric are secondary; the primary truth, which means forgiveness, holiness, and heaven, is conspicuous, luminous, simple, grasped instinctively by the contrite and ingenuous soul.

VIII

BACTERIA IN THE CHALICE

Aaron shall bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts.—
Exodus xxviii, 38 (R. V.).

THIS startling title stood in one of the newspapers at the head of an article touching the possibilities of contagion in handling the communion-cup. The sacramental vessels are not immune from pestilent germs, and even at the altar we must be on our guard against the defiling of the body. May not this fact put us in mind of one yet more grave—the manner in which evil subtly poisons our holy things? The iniquities of commercial, political, and social life are taken for granted; it, however, partakes of the nature of a sad surprise that the things specially accounted holy should suffer contamination. Yet, if we are faithful with ourselves, it will soon be manifest that our gold is tarnished and our silver reprobate.

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It we put our heart to the proof, we find that "the iniquity of the holy things" is not the strained phrase of a morbid imagination, but one that is amply justified by the mingled imaginations, emotions, and aims which determine and regulate our conduct. The pride of our humility, the vanity of our charity, the selfishness of our sacrifice, the cold calculation of our purity and temperance, the partisanship of our zeal, are discovered to us by occasional convicting flashes which send us with shamefacedness to the mercy-seat, seeking the forgiveness of which we so acutely feel the need. Professor Jowett once said to J. A. Symonds, "If there were but only one strong and perfect thing in me, I should feel worthier." Alas! when the white light of heaven searches the soul, and analyses the thoughts, principles, and motives by which we are actuated in their very inception and essence, we become sorrowfully conscious that there is within us not one strong and perfect thing, and that unworthy elements have entered into and discoloured the noblest workings of the mind and heart.

Science tells us that bacteria lurk in the white snow and sparkling dew; and the purest saints are conscious of secret frailty marring holiest things

and hours. Infection, alloy, degeneration, play their part in the spiritual as well as the natural sphere.

Life-giving love rots to devouring fire;
Justice corrupts to despicable revenge;
Motherhood chokes in the dam's jealous mire;
Hunger for growth turns fluctuating change;
Love's anger grand grows spiteful human wrath,
Hunting men out of conscience' holy path;
And human kindness takes the tattler's range.

In private devotional hours it is not difficult to shut the door of our chamber, but it is far from easy to close the door of the mind upon base and secular images and feelings. We sometimes read the Scriptures in such a mood and with such a bias that the sacred page is made to give a sanction to our unworthier self, and to strengthen in us views and impulses which ought to be mortified. Our prayers are hindered by insincerity, uncharitableness, impatience, and unbelief; we regard iniquity in our heart, and therefore many petitions we offer can never be put into the golden censer. How much that misdemeanors enters into public worship! The preacher's self-consciousness sullies the sermon, merely artistic delectation desecrates the hallowed strain of song, whilst

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vacancy, worldly thought, and wandering fancies make even the devout worshipper a saddening marvel to himself. There is only too good reason for the supplication at the close of the services of the holy day:—

Whate'er beneath Thy searching eyes
Has wrought to spoil our sacrifice,
Mid this sweet stillness while we bow,
Jesus, our Lord, forgive us now.

In all our church life carnal elements betray themselves; and if our fellows do not suspect us of hypocrisy, our own heart condemns us.

Outside sanctuaries, Sabbaths, and Scriptures are institutions, days, and relations whose sacredness we must not forget. The loves of the home, kinship, friendship, citizenship, the treasures of literature, the gifts of beauty, the stewardship of wealth, the flowers and lutes of pleasure—these are holy also. "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holy unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holy unto the Lord of hosts." But if these things are great and noble, divine symbols and instruments, of infinite sug-

gestion and purport, how often are we forgetful and perverse, awakening in our better moments to reproach ourselves with the sin of sacrilege!

We must not think lightly of these sins because they seem in their refinement to stand apart from and beyond ordinary morality. They are not ecclesiastical but real sins, and with all their apparent subtilization they injuriously affect the whole sphere of character and action equally with coarser faults. In coining, the addition to gold of one five-hundredth part by weight of bismuth produces an alloy which crumbles under the die and refuses to take an impression; the very scent of an incongruous element sometimes debases and destroys the whole vast mass into which it enters. And if in physics the influence of minute admixtures is so immense, we may be sure that the iniquity of our holy things is not less pervasive and disastrous, affecting all that we are and do, and vitiating what otherwise would be the pure gold of life and action. The bacteria which infect the sacramental cup are none the less deadly for the sacred association; the poison is in nowise attenuated; all the malignant results may be expected to follow just as surely as if the communicant had been inoculated with fatal germs conveyed by

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vessels of revelry. Sin is no less virulent transmitted through holy channels. And these iniquities are equally heinous before God. Instinctively we are most shocked when we find evil in association with noblest virtues, holiest places, and duties of most solemn import. This instinct is true. The nearer a thing stands to God, the more we are perplexed and distressed to find in it any quality of evil. The iniquity of our holy things is an aggravated iniquity.

A greater Priest than Aaron bears away these and all other iniquities. Nothing weighs more heavily on a pure soul than the memory of this class of sins. Alas that even here we have failed! We have not kept our foot when we entered the house of God; we have touched the ark carelessly; we have soiled the vessels of the altar; we have failed to hallow the gifts of life; we have worshipped God with unclean lips. Come, availing Priest! bear away these iniquities for which we repent in sackcloth and ashes; and, at last, make our holy things holy indeed, faultless even when judged in the light of the throne.

IX

CONCURRENT ADAPTATION

Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.—PHILIPPIANS iv. 11, 12 (R. V.).

TRUE life with serene acquiescence accommodates itself to things as they are, and, whilst still pursuing its highest ideals, finds in its surroundings the conditions of its unfolding and satisfaction. All inward irritation and revolt on the score of circumstance means so much defect of life. It is of the first importance to understand this.

I. Note *the Wide Range of the Apostle's Experience*. "I know how to be abased and how to abound, to be filled and to be hungry, to abound and to be in want." We are naturally curious as to the history of a teacher who declares that he has

found the secret of perennial content. If the circumstances of such a man were narrow and monotonous, if his life were cloistered and uneventful, we should not be greatly impressed by his avowal; he who is to witness with effect on this subject must have a history. This the apostle had. He had ranged all climes from the South to the North Pole of human circumstance and sentiment. He began his evangelistic career with a heavenly vision and the assurance of a great election, and the joy and glory of this vision and election never departed from him. The Lord said unto Ananias, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Yet all through the years over against this splendid consciousness was the humiliating fact that his apostleship was denied by a considerable section of his brethren, who treated him with contempt. His was the mighty genius that could grapple with the greatest problems of philosophy; yet he was shut up to ponder these problems whilst his own hands ministered to his necessities. He knew the fascination of power and dignity, of culture and enjoyment; yet the whole pathos of life chastened his soul; the minister of God, "in much

patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; . . . by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed." He was no stranger to the precious joy of being appreciated and loved by noble men and women who received him as an angel of God, and who parted with him sorrowing most of all because they should see his face no more; and he knew the keen pang of being "in peril by false brethren." He was privileged to realize the loftiest mental uplifting and ecstasy; "caught up into paradise," he "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter": yet interwoven with this supernal rapture were the dark threads of an inscrutable sorrow. "Lest I should be exalted above measure, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh." His fiery, enterprising soul spurned narrow limits, the circumnavigation of charity was his master-passion; yet for long periods he suffered bonds and imprisonment. He shared with the aristocracy the distinctions of hereditary right, social privilege, and exceptional education; yet it was his fate to

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be identified with slaves and the offscouring of all things. He traversed as few have done the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths, of trial and discipline. He knew all the tensions and pressures of the soul. A few historical characters surprise us by the wide range of their experience, by the variety of their vicissitudes, and by the romantic and tragic elements which mingle in their career. The apostle is one of the very chief of these cosmopolitan souls. The large language of the text in his lips was no mere rhetoric, but the utterance of one who had been tossed to and fro between the utmost extremes of human fortune and experience.

He assures us, however, that no change found him unprepared. From none did he shrink, and by none did he suffer loss. The episodes of rare elevation, of distinguished privilege, of recognition, success, and felicity, did not intoxicate him, or relax the firmness and force of his soul; whilst, on the other hand, adversity was borne in the temper of serene acquiescence and mastery. Acute variability is the severest test to which anything can be put. It is in Nature. Searching and sudden changes in temperature are peculiarly inimical to vegetation. Some districts of Central Asia, for

instance, are subject to such variations. The sun at mid-day is so hot that the skin breaks, and yet the next moment a snow-storm may fall. The fatal influence of this contrast on vegetation is shown by the fact that over wide areas not even a lichen is to be found; or if a plant occurs, it is utterly misshapen. Much the same thing happens to the human body when subjected to severe changes of condition. A diver returning abruptly into the normal atmosphere from one of a high pressure exposes himself to the greatest danger; he suffers from "diver's palsy," and probably dies from paralysis of the heart, solely owing to the rapid transition between a pressure of three atmospheres in which he has been working and the upper air. But most of all are severe and rapid alternations of environment trying to character. Those who have not mastered the secret of adjusting themselves to the incidents of the perpetual unsettlements of life are liable to suffer terribly in spirit and faith, temper and character. All around us we may see how circumstances reveal the latent defects of men; the favourites of fortune being degraded by prosperity, the sons and daughters of misfortune soured by neglect and failure; whilst those who unexpectedly pass from one condition

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to the other disclose moral weaknesses hitherto unsuspected and often suffer irretrievable loss. St. Paul, however, boldly declares that he knows the secret of harmonizing himself with his environment, and getting good and blessing out of it, whatever it may be.

II. *Mark the Process by which the Apostle arrived at this Perfect Contentment.* "In all things have I learned the secret." Whatever may be the aspect of his lot to the carnal eye, he accepts it with gratitude and expectation: "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." How, then, is the Christian thoroughly reconciled to a life which occasions the natural man such deep discomfort, and which involves him in dire peril?

I. *Christ restores the inner harmony of our nature upon which the interpretation of the outer world depends.*—Our estimate of the world depends largely upon the state of mind we bring to its study. It is commonly said that "the eye creates half that it sees," which is a figurative way of saying that our estimate of things is largely subjective, that the outside world in a considerable degree derives its colour from the mind. Very different is the same scene to the eye of genius and to the eye of the vulgar. To a large

mind objects and events which appear to the superficial altogether insignificant are recognized as most solemn and suggestive. All things to the sad wear sober colourings, whilst life is bright and beautiful in the sunshine of the soul. One of our deepest errors in life is that we fix our attention on the environment and infer that everything depends upon it and upon its modification; forgetting the fact that the decisive factor is the state of mind that we bring to the interpretation of things. In the world of Nature, in the relations of society, in the facts and sensations of life we see ourselves as in a mirror. This being so, what is the state of mind that we bring to the contemplation and interpretation of the circumstances and events which make up our history? Do we approach the facts of life with a wise, calm, sincere, reasonable soul? The very reverse is true. We bring to its interpretation egotism, pride, anger, and lust; we are swayed by vain, fierce, and stormy passions; our heart is full of all unreasonableness and inordinate desire. Here is the secret of our deep vexation and unappeasable discontent. The turbid, lurid, demoniac world within us is reflected on the exterior world, and we forthwith find that whatever is, is worst. Amiel has a pro-

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found passage bearing on this problem: "We are never more discontented with others than when we are discontented with ourselves. The consciousness of wrong-doing makes us irritable, and our heart in its cunning quarrels with what is outside it, in order that it may deafen the clamour within." How true! The intemperance, pride, selfishness, and wilfulness which we cherish in our hearts make us impatient, fretful, and unthankful, whatever may be the cast and colour of things about us. Our real quarrel is with our own shadow, and the very intensity of the sunshine of life only accentuates the ugly image; therefore is it that the unhappiest of men are often the greatest and the most fortunate.

In this disordered and troubled spirit Christ works a benign and total change. He brings us to see light in His light. He harmonizes the soul with God. The sense of alienation, enmity, and condemnation passes away, and infinite peace fills and guards the heart. He harmonizes us with mankind, enabling us to love our neighbour as ourselves. He harmonizes the soul with itself, the internal anarchy giving place to the sweet, strong order of the kingdom of God. In the sovereign power of redeeming and sanctifying grace

the conscience is sprinkled from guilt, the passions are purified, the heart glows with love, the will is sceptred, and with peace, patience, and power dwelling within there is no longer any reason or temptation to quarrel with things outside. A beautiful face, or a beautiful soul, is easily pleased with the mirror, with or without a gold frame.

2. *By rendering us self-sufficing, Christ renders us largely independent of the outer world.—*

This is the deep thought of the apostle in this passage. He had learned the secret of contentment because the promise of his Lord was being fulfilled in him: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life." To the natural man the world of circumstance is the whole of life. His portion is this world; whatever he hopes or fears is here. The fluctuations of fortune are therefore of absorbing concern. If things go wrong in regard to health, money, promotion, or pleasure, life is a failure. But he who lives in the Spirit, and walks in the Spirit, has an altogether different conception of the place and power of circumstance. He knows of another

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world than that which meets the carnal eye—of a kingdom within him having marvellous interests, treasures, dignities, sciences, and delights of its own. He is the conscious possessor of a diviner strength, a fairer beauty, a profounder wisdom, a vaster music, of a gold that waxes not dim and a purple that no moth frets. He attains perfections more exquisite than the most envied attributes of the body—possessions more rich than lands or merchandise, delights more rare than the purest mental pleasures. Within his own heart he carries the summer, the fountain, the nightingale, and the rose, therefore the palace does not mock nor the prison paralyse. We see a parallel to this in intellectual men. The great poet, artist, musician, or scientist has such sources within himself, he is so wrapped up in golden dreams, drinks from such deep springs, gazes on such wide horizons, knows such fullness and freshness of life, that he becomes almost unconscious of blindness, disease, poverty, and neglect; or, if circumstances put within his grasp fame and riches, his strange indifference to such prizes excites the surprise of meaner men. All this is true in the highest degree of men whose life is in the Spirit. Such are satisfied from themselves to an extent which strangely

detaches them from earthly things and renders them a problem to the unspiritual.

Full of the sense of the reality of the spiritual life, men like St. Paul hold loosely the things which are seen and temporal: impressed by the grandeur of the moral life, they have little disposition to quarrel with their shape and skin; conscious of the growth of spiritual power and vision, they cease to fret at mental limitations and infirmities; and, anticipating a glorious and an abiding inheritance, they are less anxious throughout the pilgrimage as to whether they march with the van or rear. Solemnized by the thought of God, ennobled by the friendship of Christ, comforted by the communion of the Holy Ghost, tasting the powers of the world to come, they are not inflated by the rarer gifts of Nature, beguiled by the brilliant episodes of fortune, or intoxicated by the incense of society. Walking in the light of the sun, they no longer kiss their hand to the moon. Nor, on the other hand, are they paralysed and embittered by unsuccessfulness and suffering. "Everything is lost but honour" was the proud boast of Francis on the fatal field of Pavia; and the fallen king felt that what was left was more than what was lost, and that what was left was an availing



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consolation for all that was lost. In an eminent degree does the godly man realize this consolation. Whatever may be blighted, shattered, or destroyed in the chances and changes of this mortal life does not touch the glorious facts of the soul. Any loss may be borne with equanimity whilst the heart is garrisoned by peace, and the great things of character are retained and enhanced.

3. *By strengthening us in the inner man Christ makes us masters of circumstance.*—"I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." The apostle was conscious of an inner strength which enabled him to subordinate all the fluctuations of fortune to highest consequences of edification and blessing. Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace enlarges upon the fact that man differs essentially from all other mammals in this respect—that whereas any important adaptations to new conditions can be effected in them only by a change of bodily structure, man is able to adapt himself to much greater changes of condition by a mental development leading him to the use of fire, of tools, of clothing, of improved dwellings, of nets and snares, and of agriculture. By the help of these, without any change whatever in his bodily structure, he has been able to spread over and occupy the



whole earth; to dwell securely in forest, plain, or mountain; to inhabit alike the burning desert or the Arctic wastes; to cope with every kind of wild beast; and to provide himself with food in districts where, as an animal trusting to Nature's unaided productions, he would have starved. By this mental development man was able to adapt himself to widely different circumstances, to severe and rapid changes of condition, and to coerce the most unfriendly environment to his personal advantage. His superiority over all other mammals, that which established him as monarch over all creatures, was this intellectual power of adaptation. But there is a still more wonderful moral development which enables us to adapt ourselves to all the conditions and changes of human life, that we may be profited by all. This is a faculty of transcendent value. Just as a certain mental genius enables us to live and prosper in forest, plain, or mountain, to adjust ourselves to all climes, to circumvent all enemies, and to be all the stronger for the struggle, so there is a spiritual genius which defies all vicissitudes, and puts extortion on the most obstinate and menacing circumstances to our immortal advantage. To the natural man circumstance is a

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fetich, a fickle, cruel overlord, making of him a slave and a victim; to the man in whom the light and strength of Christ are perfected circumstance has become an instrument of expression and discipline which he uses and appreciates as the musician does the pipe through which he breathes, or as the artist the palette which presents the colours with which he realizes his visions. This is the highest strength of all—the victory that overcometh the world, the grace that resists every evil influence, that serenely sustains the severest ordeal, that turns to infinite advantage every vicissitude of a life changing with every hour. In this magnificent strength of soul we find the peace that the world cannot give and that it cannot take away.

X

THE NEARNESS OF THE ESSENTIAL IN LIFE'S DISCIPLINE

Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding.—PROVERBS xvii. 24 (R. V.).

A DISTINGUISHED naturalist declares that the best bird-nester is the village simpleton. He starts on his quest without crediting the birds with any extraordinary subtlety, and at once lights upon their retreat; whilst other seekers, assuming an acuteness in the birds which they do not possess, waste the time in exploring hidden places, overlooking the nest right before their eyes. This is a parable of human life. Things of the greatest moment are being constantly overlooked because of the mistaken notion that whatever is of the first consequence is uncommon, hidden, and remote. The essential thing is the intimate thing, but we miss it because we stare high and wide. Sincere and serious men find the es-

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sential truths, gifts, and opportunities of life close at hand. Wisdom, beauty, happiness, and usefulness await them in their immediate neighbourhood; whatever is needed for the satisfaction of life, the discipline of character, or the accomplishment of success is immediate and available. "The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth." Whatever is desirable is foreign, and chiefly unattainable. The fool bemoans himself, as one born out of due time. He is satisfied that had he come earlier he would have shone: or he complains that he has come before his age; a future and more intellectual generation would have appreciated him, and given him an opportunity to distinguish himself. Nor has he found the right place. His environment is unsuitable, and in some altogether distant and different situation he would have achieved success and happiness. The fool is he who despises the actual and possible, and longs for what is not; he is never where his eyes are.

The text is, then, a warning against vain conceits and regrets, against frittering away life sighing for impossible conditions, whilst missing the glory before our eyes, the treasures at our feet, the prizes within our grasp. In so many words,

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the sacred writer exhorts us to make the best of things as they are, and the promise is implied that if we do so we shall not be disappointed. We must beware lest a discontented heart and roving imagination cheat us out of the splendid possibilities of actual life.

Do not despise the *familiar*. The elements of happiness, sources of improvement, and opportunities for service and sacrifice are never far to seek. "Distance lends enchantment to the view"; but they who know, know that the spot on which they stand is enchanted. Really no folly is more egregious than that of looking high and wide for the essential gifts and blessings as though God had forgotten or denied them. Our star is in our brain, not in the sky; our ship of gold is at the quay awaiting its discharge, and not upon the high seas; our fortune is at our feet, not at the foot of the rainbow. Let us lay it to heart, there is nothing better for us in the wide universe than the set of circumstances which constitute the framework of our contemporaneous life.

Many of us know the North Gallery at the Royal Gardens, Kew. The gifted artist who presented that collection of paintings to the nation

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visited all climes in search of the rare flowers she sought to delineate. She travelled in Syria and on the Nile, in North America, the West Indies, Brazil, California, Japan, Borneo, Java, Ceylon, India, Australia, South Africa, Madagascar, Chili, and many other remote lands, seeking out whatever was curious, rare, or splendid in vegetation; yet at the end of life she confessed that the familiar flowers of her native land are unsurpassed: "No life is so charming as a country one in England, and no flowers are sweeter or more lovely than the primroses, cowslips, bluebells, and violets which grow in abundance all round me here."

This is at least equally true of the individual life, with its special gifts, privileges, and discipline. The primroses, cowslips, bluebells, and violets of our simple, homely life show the wisdom and love of God, and bring to us a sweetness and fragrance that the flowers of Paradise could not surpass. The roses and orchids of opulence, the myrtles and laurels of history, the asphodels of romance and poetry, contain no virtue to outrival the essential loveliness and balm of the wild flowers which light the pathway of the humblest. Let us be quick to appreciate the concealed glory of

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the commonplace. The very wisdom that fixed the stars determines the bounds of our habitation and ordains our lot. He who so cunningly balances the forces, mixes the colours, and guides the movements of Nature makes all things to work together for our good. Let us not quarrel with our circumstances because of their triteness and familiarity; grasping at large shadows, we may miss the substance. "What hast thou in thine hand?" Begin there, and out of simple, ordinary instruments and surroundings God shall bring wonderful things to pass. "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Expect to see the glory of God on desert ground and in the scrub of the wilderness. If any man can change his condition with a view to its improvement, he is free to do so; but in the meantime let him improve and sanctify to the uttermost the actual world of to-day, for therein lies his wealth and happiness. If we cannot see the miracle and magnificence of the commonplace, we convict ourselves of a lack of imagination, for verily the miracle and magnificence are there.

Do not despise the *mean*. "Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding." The wise see great significance and taste rich satisfac-

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tions in what appears to the carnal eye poor and base, the bread-and-butter life is lighted up by the beatific vision; on the other hand, the fool hates the drudgery of duty, the weariness of work, the monotonousness of mere faithfulness, and takes refuge in day-dreams and fiction generally. Let us beware of scorning the grey, coarse, beaten pathway; for it is a section of the King's highway, despite its dreariness. In the past, when our fathers wished to excite the imagination they called in the magician to unveil unearthly caves and landscapes full of jewels as big as rocks, and abundant as the stones of the street; now we no longer need such romances, since science has discovered a new Arabian Nights in the very dust and rubbish of Nature. There is a fairy tale in the meanest flower that grows; the paving-stones, interpreted by geology, are as precious as striped jasper; in a drop of dirty water hides the rainbow; and the off-scouring of all things in the hands of the chemist turns out gold, beauty, and fragrance. Thus in human life we may not seek charm and enrichment in extraordinary elements, dramatic situations, and fine frenzies; all we need is the opening of our eyes to the large purpose and high efficiency of commonplace persons, places,

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and days. The considerable extent to which jewels are now being used in mean work is quite remarkable. Once they were strictly reserved for the finger of the rich, the tiara and necklace of beauty, the crown of kings; now, instead of being purely ornamental, they are pressed into the roughest, hardest utilitarian service. They are used in glaciers' tools, dentists' drills, granite-cutters' saws, and rock-drills, whilst diamonds and sapphires are fixed in thousands of meters for registering the supply of electricity. A democratic age has captured the glittering gem and set it to do dirty work. Yet has the gem suffered no degradation—to cut, drill, and measure abate nothing of its glory. God also has His jewels, and one day He will make them up. But in the meantime where are they? Shall they be sought in high places, flaming forth in beauty? Is the world talking of their pure lustre? Do they repose softly in the jewel-cases of wealth and art? Do they coruscate on festal days? Are they the pride of fashionable circles? Surely not. Very often the jewels of God are fixed in coarsest settings, secreted in shabbiest neighbourhoods, doomed to meanest vocations, delivered to basest uses in the work-a-day world; not one beam of

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their intrinsic beauty struggles through their sordid lot, not one sparkle of distinction reveals their royal quality and destination. Of the lowliest of these we may boast, "Thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God"; yet to-day their station is obscure, their calling paltry, their work hewing wood and drawing water. Do not despise common positions; they require splendid souls to fill them: do not despise common tasks; it requires rare souls to accomplish them. Only God's jewels can worthily work out His great purpose in humble places and things; and in thus working out His purpose they are proved and polished against the great day of coronation. Look not wistfully to the high, the distant, the rare; see all needful things in the routine of common days. Do not weaken the soul with vain longings and idealizations. There is no victory like that of the commonplace life bravely lived. John Wesley thought highly of the man who "persevered in dry duty"; of that man God emphatically approves. "To them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and incorruption, eternal life."

Do not despise the *small*. "The eyes of a fool

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are in the ends of the earth" seeking great things, whilst in the apparently insignificant close at hand reside most momentous possibilities. The wise accept thankfully the small sphere, the one talent, the few things. Rittner observes in his *Impressions of Japan*; "In small things the Japanese are wonderfully artistic; no country can paint china better, or carve more perfectly, whether in ivory or wood; but in big things they seem to lose themselves entirely, and flounder, trying to imitate what they do not understand." And yet the Japanese, artistic in the little, are no despicable folk! This kind of genius God gives to the multitude; and blessed are we who make the best use of it, depreciating neither ourselves nor our calling. How many are ruined by stretching out, to what is beyond their measure, made supremely miserable by attempting things too high for them! It is far better to be a king in the kingdom of the leasts than a blunderer in the gigantic. In the most restricted sphere every noble quality of human nature may be illustrated, every grand work wrought. The scale of a man's life is of small consequence; perhaps it is of no consequence. The artist who carved the constellations on a cherry-stone has often been derided, yet he

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was no fool. It is the supreme task of the million to illustrate the grand laws of the heavenly universe on the inch scale, to win the splendid prizes of eternity by the wise use of a few days.

XI

THE CLAIM OF THE OUTSIDER

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.—COLOSSIANS iv. 5.

I NOTE *the distinction here assumed*, "them that are without," which necessarily implies them that are within. This distinction is assumed throughout the New Testament.

The *reality* of this division. It is a simple, sharp, tremendous line to which many object; they do not think it founded in fact. To call men sheep or goats, wheat or tares, to distinguish them as within or without, is rejected as a dramatic dualism that will not satisfy thinking men: we must be distributed into many categories, it is impossible to thrust us into two. Nevertheless, the severe distinction of the text is based on fact, and must be maintained. We serve one master: on the best of authority we affirm this. We obey one law: the higher law of the mind, or the lower of the flesh. The antagonism

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between France and Germany is emphatic, and the frontier is exactly defined—a clear line of demarcation not to be crossed with impunity. So, there is a life of the flesh and a life of the spirit: they are distinct from each other, they are contrary the one to the other; we are unable to live both at the same time. We develop one character. We cannot regard each single act of a man as an independent item; our moral character is a complete whole; all the acts of our life are penetrated by one spirit, connected by one aim. Our character is the outcome of one dominant idea, one reigning purpose, one master-passion. We are within or without.

The *determination* of this distinction. Who are the within, who the without? In the New Testament this momentous question is decided by our relation to Christ. To be within is to be in Him. "He spake of the temple of His body." *He* is the true Church. His personality is the true sanctuary that God has pitched, and not man—the glorious dwelling-place where meet and worship the saints of all nations and ages. In Christ we serve the true Master; in Him we find grace to keep the highest law; in Him we develop the perfect character.

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The *infinite significance* of this distinction. How much is meant to the apostle to be "in Christ"! We feel that he uttered the words with flashing eye and bounding heart. To him it meant the knowledge of God's infinite love, reconciliation with God, the secret of a holy life, immortality. The glory of Christianity must be seen from within. We are exhorted in some quarters to judge Christ as we should another man, to judge the Bible as we should another book, the Church as we should any other institution; but we cannot thus understand the faith of Christ. We do not know the glory of a garden by a glimpse through the hedge, the glory of a cathedral by walking about it and looking up at its dark windows, or the glory of a country by sailing round its shores; the garden, shrine, or country must be judged from within, and from within must we judge the Lord Jesus and all that pertains to His faith and service. It is from the standpoint of personal trust, sympathy, and experience that we realize the reality and preciousness of all that is comprehended by the Church of God. But if to be within signifies safety and peace, to be without is to be outside the ark, struggling with the deluge.

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II. *The Duty of the Within to the Without.*—The Jews were contemptuous to those who were beyond the pale of their Church; but St. Paul here teaches that Christians must obey another spirit. They must act judiciously toward all men; that is, they must seek to conciliate and attract both Jews and pagans by their moral superiority and finer spirit. Thus are we to behave to all outside the Christian fellowship. To this end—

We must maintain *high character*. We extol the gloriousness of the Church, with its confirming sacraments, its lofty songs, its inspiring fellowships, its strengthening ministries; but what does the man in the street know of the Church except by what he sees that comes out of it? Readers of the Apocalypse feel sure that the interior of the New Jerusalem must be unspeakably glorious when its exterior is so superb—its foundations jewels, its walls jasper, its gates pearl; and if strangers are to believe in the glorious things spoken of Zion the City of God, they must be impressed with the beauty and glory that meet their eye. What can the mass of men know of the glory of the Bible except as they judge by what comes out of it? We are charmed when we contemplate the doctrine of Christ on the sacred page;

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but how irresistible that doctrine becomes displayed in practical life! Years ago we read a work on Alpine flowers which was vividly written and brilliantly illustrated; yet when we saw those very flowers in blue, gold, and crimson growing on the mountains, we better understood their true glory. So the graces inculcated in revelation are most eloquent seen in living men and women in the shop, the home, the market-place. Yes, the world can know what is in the Church, in the Bible, and in Christ only as it is expressed in the lives of the saints; and if they give defective or feeble expression to Christian truth and grace, they do injustice to the faith, and prejudice it in the eyes of them that are without.

The grand power of persuasion and evangelization is in actual nobleness of Christian life. Not "*Talk* in wisdom," but "*Walk* in wisdom." The psalmist, speaking of Nature, reminds us that "there is no speech, nor language; the voice cannot be heard." No voice or language is called for. The sun needs no syllables to assure us that it shines; a letter of commendation is not necessary with the evening star; the blue sky requires no dictionary to explain itself; no elocution is desirable to set forth the purity and gran-

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deur of the sea ; and the purple patch on the mountain-side, the golden gorse on the heath, the red rose of the garden, persuade us of their lustre and sweetness without any tricks of rhetoric. Breath and babble are wasted when we look with direct and open vision upon truth and beauty ; signs and speech are superfluous when perfection stands revealed. Thus noble character dispenses with talk ; it appeals directly to the souls of men with irresistible power. The Church must be more like Nature, ever putting forth glorious things, conquering the world with silent beauty, dumb eloquence, music without words.

“Walk in wisdom.” That is, when you possess the essential elements of the Christian character be on your guard against technical defects which hide or diminish the full effect of that character. We often do ourselves and the cause of Christ great injustice by faults of temper and life which greatly lessen our influence. As every one knows, the famous Church of St. Peter at Rome was not completed according to the original plan of Michael Angelo ; a later builder put up the façade in another order of architecture, in consequence of which the grand dome that Angelo fixed in the golden air is largely concealed, and the splendid

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proportions of the structure are not adequately realized. So Christian men and women allow in themselves ways and habits not in harmony with their great Ideal, and which sadly obscure their general excellence. By injudiciousness, thoughtlessness, tactlessness, and other frailties they dim their light and destroy their influence. Or, whilst their substantial and genuine goodness is admitted on all hands, they are familiarly known as "grumpy," "peppery," "stingy," "naggy," and so on. Such failures lamentably mar the beauty and force of fine qualities and sincere character, as the façade obscures the glory of St. Peter's.

Oh! let us take care of character. So long as the Church stands out in the beauty of holiness, in acts of love, in ministries of blessing, it attracts, grows, triumphs; but all is over on the day that there are finer characters out of it than there are in it.

We must cherish *a gracious spirit*. To win men calls for grace of character as well as truth of character, and it is of first importance that we should be mindful of manner, style, tone. The without may be alienated by *rigidness*. Conscientiousness is essential; but we must beware of in-

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sisting upon hard-and-fast rules which are chiefly gratuitous. Our goodness should be pleasant, condescending, free. The artist tells us that Nature abhors the straight line, that the curve is the line of beauty; and it is thus in morals: the unbending, exacting temper only irritates and repels those with whom we have to do. Christians who are so fond of straight lines that they would square the sun and flatten the rainbow do little to recommend their faith. We alienate by *roughness*. At a meeting for Christian fellowship we heard a brother deplore that he found himself "lacking in that perfect courtesy which ought to distinguish the Christian." We do not remember to have heard this grace ever referred to in such a meeting except on this occasion. How much the cause of religion suffers from the lack of it! We hear the protest, "I do not care for smoothness and suavity; I believe in reality and outspokenness." What! is not silk as real as sandpaper, and is it not infinitely more effective? We repel by *hardness*. Kindness, sympathy, tenderness go a long way in dealing with outsiders; but good people sometimes give little play to softness of feeling. They remind one of a tuning-fork; they are genuine enough, and you get from them a true

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note in a steely fashion, yet no one will mistake the sound for music, or care to die for such an instrument. It is when we become sweet as is Apollo's lute, nay, when we have been tuned to a yet diviner music, that the world feels the drawing magic. In a hard world like this the most unspiritual of men at once recognize love as having its source in heavenly places. We alienate by *gloominess*. A sunny heart and face in these pessimistic days are great soul-winners. Men have an instinctive belief that truth is at the bottom of gladness, and they doubt the creed of one without mirthfulness. As Robert Louis Stevenson protests to a correspondent: "I do not call that by the name of religion which fills a man with bile." Yet how many of us are habitually austere and sad! We remember seeing a South African journal which contained an advertisement for a lady help: "A Christian preferred; cheerful, if possible." So it has come to that!

The worst thing that the Pharisee did in the old days was to set goodness itself in a repulsive light. Truths sweeter than honey and the honeycomb he rendered distasteful; he made virtue ugly; he succeeded in causing men to hate the smell of roses, even the roses of the paradise of

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God. His temper and method made the people shrink from the noble righteousness that he so miserably caricatured. It was for this cause that Christ so bitterly denounced the Pharisee. We must take care how we render goodness hateful; it is a sin that cannot fall far short of the unpardonable sin. How different with our Master! In Him the apples of gold were set in baskets of silver; all the graces shone forth in unhindered glory. Whilst the solemnity of the eternal underlay His character, and infinite seriousness breathed in all He said and did, He was gentle, generous, indulgent, full of peace and holy joy, and the people wondered at the gracious words that fell from His lips. At last men knew One who was at once glorious in holiness and winsome beyond all telling; they saw "how awful Goodness is, and Virtue in her shape how lovely." Let us be filled with His Spirit and emulate His example. "Sweetness and light," demands the critic. Yes, let us give him more of that for which he asks—our beauty like the olive, our smell like Lebanon. In the diary of Andrew A. Bonar we read: "In prayer in the wood for some time, having set apart three hours for devotion; felt drawn out much to pray for that peculiar fragrance which believers

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have about them who are very much in fellowship with God. It is like an aroma, unseen but felt. Other Christians have the beauty of the Rose of Sharon; these have the fragrance too."

XII

TRIVIAL TROUBLE

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and though in a land of peace thou art secure, yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?—JEREMIAH xii. 5 (R. V.).

IN *Mosses from an Old Manse* Nathaniel Hawthorne writes: "There are so many unsubstantial sorrows which the necessity of our mortal stage begets on idleness, that an observer, casting aside sentiment, is sometimes led to question whether there may be any real woe except absolute physical suffering and the loss of closest friends." This is, of course, an extreme statement of the case. Beside physical suffering and bereavement there are many other forms of affliction real and terrible enough. Yet it must be allowed that our sorrows are often largely unsubstantial and our bitter complaints wellnigh groundless. We condole with ourselves about troubles which are simply passing inconveniences;

we magnify pin-pricks into crucifixions. The proof that so many of us have little real trouble is found in the fact that we so piercingly bewail trifling losses and pains; were the distresses more acute, we should say less about them. We have only to observe the sufferings of our neighbours to understand the absurdity of our complaints. If a slight breeze rocks the ship, the passengers are distressed as much as though they were suffering shipwreck; but the old salt who knows what the wrath of the ocean really means smiles at their much ado about nothing. Those who know what real trouble means, who have encountered the storms that shake the soul, listen with a compassionate smile to the glib recital of sentimental tragedies. Our fluent lamentations over a disagreeable incident, which when examined turns out to be nothing more than a discomfort, most convincingly prove that we are really well off; one genuine misfortune, one shattering thunderbolt, would silence our woful tale. In the meantime we make more ado about a crumpled rose leaf than thousands of noble men and women do about a crown of thorns.

The age in which we live tends to intensify sensitiveness, and we need constantly to be on

guard against magnifying molehills into mountains and thistles into forests. However hardly we may think of the present age, it is in many respects an indulgent one; it is certainly far more so than those which have preceded it: we are taken care of on every side, it is not too much to say that we are habitually coddled, our endless artificial wants are promptly and ingeniously met, we enjoy facilities and luxuries innumerable, until we are fast becoming hypersensitive, and reckon ourselves martyrs if the wind blows a little hot or cold, if we are teased by a gnat, or even if we are overtaken by "the pleasant trouble of the rain." The habit of taking count of these shallow troubles, talking about them, nursing them, seeking sympathy on account of them, making far more of them than the just proportion of things will allow, is a dangerous tendency that needs to be vigilantly watched and checked.

The habit of pampering ourselves shows how far we have lost sight of the seriousness of life. The sacramental host of God has ever been prepared to accept great losses and sufferings for the high rewards it contemplates. "The noble army of martyrs" is the glory of God's Church, and in a real sense representative of its spirit and

power. Its members have sworn allegiance to a Captain who was "made perfect through suffering"; and in all ages they have dared the most tremendous tribulations that they might win eternal life. Our disproportionate attention to minor miseries shows how far we have lost sight of the extreme seriousness of the true idea and design of human life. Discoverers seeking new worlds do not whine about the mosquito; soldiers intent on great campaigns do not fret about wind and weather; and when Christians duly recognize the greatness of their ideals and hopes they become oblivious of irritations and worries which plague the natural man. Out for a picnic we may be exacting about flowers, sunshine, and entertainments, but absorbed in momentous undertakings trifles are forgotten. The great thoughts of the Christian life have not adequately taken hold of us, its enthusiasms and passions do not stir us as they ought, or we should almost unconsciously disregard the infinitesimal matters which now worry us. Let, then, the unreasonable extent to which minute cares and vexations disturb remind us of the fact that our life is superficial, our faith in higher things faint, our devotion to God and eternity lacking in reality and

completeness. Larger thoughts, deeper emotions, a life in more constant fellowship with things above, will effectually check the murmur and the sigh.

To brood over paltry trials reveals littleness of soul, and accentuates that littleness. We are in danger of deceiving ourselves on this point. It is not uncommon for men to believe that they are able to bear great calamities better than they can small ones. They lose all patience with an attack of toothache, yet fancy that they could smilingly endure leprosy or consumption; they lose their temper with the silly oversights of domestics and workpeople, but they are sure that a crushing misfortune would evoke their heroism; they lose all dignity and peace of mind in dealing with the peddling mishaps of routine life, yet cherish the belief that they are prepared to take arms against a sea of troubles whenever it happens to break forth. It is a flattering unction we should refuse to lay to our soul. Wesley tells that one day sitting by the fire of a wealthy gentleman a puff of smoke came down the chimney, whereupon the host plaintively addressed the evangelist, "You see, sir, I have to put up daily with this kind of thing." Are we to believe that behind this fretfulness the man hid

the strength of a martyr, and that whilst he was subdued by the smoke he could stand the fire? It is an illusion. He who is wearied in a sprint with the footmen will never contend successfully with horses; he who faints in the land of peace will make a poor show in the swelling of Jordan. Little physical energy is left when the grasshopper becomes a burden; little energy of soul remains when the grasshopper of trivial trouble is allowed to plague us. And as fretfulness indicates spiritual feebleness it accentuates it; it effectually precludes inward largeness, strength, and heroism.

The habit of repining unfits us to deal with the real troubles awaiting us farther on. We ought so to run with the footmen that we shall be able to bridle the horses; we ought so to dwell in the land of peace—careless of its gnats, contemptuous of its grasshoppers—that it shall prove a precious discipline against the day when deep calls unto deep, and when all the waves and billows go over us; but to permit the inevitable friction of everyday life to waste our power is to lay ourselves open to inglorious humiliations whenever the crisis comes. Let us not destroy the nerve which will be so sorely needed in the fiery hour, the

overflowing tide. A reticent way of bearing immaterial trouble braces us to play our part worthily whenever we are called to battle with avalanche, earthquake, and blizzard.

XIII

THE GOLDEN MEAN

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.—PHILIPPIANS iv. 5.

“**Y**OUR moderation,” forbearance, conciliatoriness, yieldingness.

1. Note this admonition as it applies to matters of *faith*. The apostle designed to put the Philippians on their guard against treating coldly or harshly those of another creed; the text is a warning against bigotry and dogmatism. The danger was lest they should exhibit an intolerant spirit in dealing with their unconverted neighbours. The eyes of the Christian Philippians had been opened to the folly and wickedness of idolatry, and they might be tempted to treat their heathen neighbours contemptuously. The apostle seeks to guard them against such superciliousness and severity. In the preceding chapter there is a reference to some who had fallen away from the

faith—"enemies of the cross of Christ." Now, these lapsed ones were not to be treated scornfully—"of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping." This was the spirit in which their fallen brethren were to be regarded. Then there were also Jews who refused to break with the Mosaic system, and the Judaising Christians who sought to bring the Church of Christ into bondage to Judaism. To all these the Philippian Christians are bound over by the apostle to be considerate, forbearing, accommodating, dealing yieldingly with the erring ones whilst not yielding for an hour to the errors themselves.

This admonition is by no means out of date; the modern Christian needs to give it most prayerful consideration, for he also is in danger of haughtiness and exclusiveness.

There is a pride of *orthodoxy*. We believe that we hold the truth, the deep, full, rational Christian faith; and this conviction, unless duly chastened, will engender a pride of orthodoxy that makes us unlovely and disagreeable. And not only may we exhibit this pride of orthodoxy in dealing with men of another creed or of no creed, we may alienate our brethren of the same Christian communion by our assumptions and criti-

cisms. The apostle puts us on our guard against this temper. He himself was intensely loyal to the evangelical truth, but his mildness and graciousness are as much in evidence as his orthodoxy.

There is the pride of *denominationalism*. The Episcopalian gathers up his garments when the Dissenter passes, murmuring the while: "I know you—a Philistine; I often see your portrait in the *Church Times* in a nocturne"; and the Dissenter retorts: "Yes, and I know you, great on steeples and bells, you know little of personal religion." If we knew more of the spirit of the Master such feelings and speeches would be impossible.

A critic writes thus of the magnificent architecture of the Alhambra palace of Granada: "Some of the irregularities which obtain here seem almost incredible. . . . There seems to be not one single point which can offend the justest eye. And yet there are nearly a dozen different archings—differing in form, in height or width; the cloister varies in breadth at each turn; the upper galleries are uneven; the doorways are the personification of self-will; the columns are sometimes placed singly, sometimes grouped, and the numbers of them on the respective sides in no way correspond. There is everywhere a magnificent

disregard of the petty rules whereby nowadays we secure sameness, and nevertheless there is an all-prevailing symmetry—and harmony. The whole is a triumph of accurately judged effect.” There is no shadow of formality, or even regularity, in the general lines or grouping of the parts; yet through the wise disposition of irregularity the consummate artist obtained the most beautiful symmetry, and the glorious structure presents the highest perfection of proportion and perspective. Thus the manifold wisdom of God is revealed in the building of His living Church. The narrow ecclesiastic seeks harmony in a universal uniformity of Articles, liturgy, ritual, and government, as the modern builder too often seeks it in bald and rigid reduplications; but the all-wise God and our Saviour Jesus Christ builds His glorious Church with infinite freedom and variety, as the Arab artist with happy artfulness attained superb beauty of proportion through a marvellous combination of differing styles, dimensions, substances, and colours. So then, whilst we hold firmly to what seems to us truest in creed and wisest in order, we must assume no airs of infallibility and monopoly, remembering that Zion, the perfection of beauty, is being fashioned out of varieties, contrasts, and

irregularities which shock the peddling denominationalist. "Being ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear."

2. The admonition of the text applies to matters of *character*. We are tempted to judge our brethren harshly; some of them are not like us in certain particulars, and we conclude that they are inferior in wisdom or devotion.

We must beware how we deal offensively with any whom we may imagine to be *inferior* to ourselves. All know what is meant in society by "the superior person"; and the superior person is not less exasperating when converted. He thinks that he cherishes higher ideals, has attained to greater strength and purity of character, and is more bold, zealous, generous, helpful than the average Christian. To such we say, Recognize frankly whatever the grace of God has done for you; yet remember it is of grace, and there is no room for word or gesture savouring of conceit and intolerance. When at last the Master reckons up all things we may not show so well as we expect, whilst those whom we despised may show a great deal better. And let us be careful lest we

grieve those who are *different* from ourselves. Evidently there was friction in the church at Philippi—"I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord." Different in temper, in attributes of character, in their preferences for modes and spheres of work, these two devoted women disagreed; no doubt they thought and spoke severely of one another, and the painful fact had become notorious. And in all ages and communions strong individuality finds mutual toleration difficult. Here also we must watch. If in winter we notice the branches of the trees, we shall find them strangely dissimilar, some being elegant and graceful, whilst others are crooked, irregular, and even fantastic; yet in summer each tree resolves itself into an object altogether symmetrical and lovely. A forest at first sight appears a mass of irregularity and eccentricity—trees big and little, long and short, bulky and slender, with boughs at every possible angle, foliage of many patterns, and with every variety of virtue and fruit; yet under the magical influences of sun and rain the multitudinous differences blend into a charming picture. So within the Church of God is room for the endless variety of human temperaments and gifts, and under the

harmonizing influence, the modulating skill, of the Holy Spirit the heterogeneous multitude is fashioned into a unity in which the originality of each adds to the splendour and blessedness of the whole. "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious." Let us remember this, and keep our individuality within fair bounds. We cannot have a church to ourselves in this world, or a paradise to ourselves in the next; let us then be rich in charity, interpreting one another kindly, honouring and sustaining one another.

This admonition applies to matters of *conduct*. We are to display our reasonableness in daily life, and not severely to judge our fellows. It is not always easy to say what is exactly right and fitting to be done; we must therefore watch against illiberality and painful dogmatism. It seems as though a gracious uncertainty had been left on many questions of conduct, so that love might find the solution impossible to reason. Take the question of dress. What is exactly right in dress? No one can fix the golden mean between the raiment of camel's hair and the purple worn in kings'

houses. That mean cannot be verbally expressed; and no one can fix the exact standard of colour, cost, and style obligatory on the ten thousand families of men with all their inequalities of position and resource. It is not easy to determine the scale for ourselves, much less for our neighbours. Take the question of amusements. What is the golden mean, the binding law here? There is no explicit law. The line of moderation is at once as real and as invisible as the equator, and only by a disciplined sensibility are we aware when we personally cross it. How presumptuous are we, then, when we dogmatically law down the law for our neighbour! Take the question of a becoming style of living. We often listen to discussions upon luxury; but what is luxury? Between the Spartan and the Sybarite, what is right for us? It is exceedingly difficult to determine this question for our own household, and we must hesitate long before judging others.

On these and many other questions affecting the obligations of men there is a real and an inevitable indefiniteness calling for caution in the regulation of our personal affairs and large charity in judging the methods of our friends. The letter of the law does not always serve—there are

many necessary deficiencies in law ; things may be done in different ways, yet be done rightly ; there is always space for private interpretation ; and consequently within these wavering, doubtful lines nothing becomes us except a spirit of discernment and magnanimity in judging the conduct of our fellows. We are not to compromise moral principle any more than we are to trifle with our faith ; but severe conscientiousness may be maintained where legalism is least obtruded, where indeed legalism is delightfully swallowed up in the law of love. "Reasonableness of dealing, not strictness of legal right but consideration for one another," is the lesson of the text and the high duty of the Christian life.

The earth itself is not a rigid body ; it yields to stress, it displays a certain plasticity for which the astronomer allows : and such is the character of living goodness. The righteousness of the formalist is rigid ; it undeviatingly follows certain maxims it has adopted and rules it has laid down, and is angrily incapable of any kind of compromise or adjustment to the unique conditions of life in which we so often find ourselves involved. It is altogether different with the highest type of goodness. The holiness of Jesus Christ revealed

a plasticity, a power and freedom of accommodation to circumstances, which contrasted strikingly with the stern pedantry of the Pharisee. The vital piety of St. Paul allowed a yieldingness to circumstance impossible to rigid legalism. The security of reality, of life, is within itself, and without the sacrifice of a particle of its integrity it makes concessions to the environment, and forwards itself by so doing. Just as the mighty ocean softly adjusts itself to all the articulations of the shore without any sacrifice of majesty; as the rock-ribbed earth is tremblingly sensitive, yielding to stress whilst delicately true to its orbit; so the strong, sincere, pure soul has a quick sense of the essential and non-essential, is ready within well-understood lines to give and take, and so preserves that aspect of ease and beauty which belongs to whatever is strong and free.

"The Lord is at hand." "The Lord is near, always beside you, to know, to love, to elevate, to calm."* We must remember that we live in the Master's presence; and therefore in His strength, for His sake, let us show in all our dealings with men the graciousness which won all hearts to

* Moole.

Himself. He is present here and now ; let Him therefore listen to no intemperate speech, witness no harshness in our conduct, grieve over no bitterness in our spirit that is so entirely alien to His own.

XIV

CRISES OF LIFE

From the end of the earth [from the edge of the precipice] will I call unto Thee.—PSALM lxi. 2 (R. V.).

Deep calleth unto deep.—PSALM xlii. 7.

A PHILOSOPHICAL friend of ours holds a particular theory about the true way of appraising this ever-fluctuating life. In the first place, we must carefully note how in the disposition of events one thing is set over against another, for no life is made up of unmitigated misfortune or of uniform prosperity: some things are for us, others against us. These incidents of fortune or misfortune being duly noted, we must next strike the average; and he thinks if this is done accurately we shall find little cause for complaint. Having satisfied himself that he has secured a fair average of advantage and happiness, the sensible man will ask no more. If a member of our family is afflicted, the others are sound; if one does badly at school or business, another is

brilliant and successful; if bitterly disappointed by the conduct of son or daughter, the character of the brothers and sisters is eminently satisfactory. In other ways, too, life is balanced. Special commercial prosperity makes amends for family trouble; rare domestic felicity compensates for business misfortunes; and popularity in public life atones for private griefs. Both sides must be brought into the reckoning, and having impartially estimated the counterbalancing experiences of success and failure, joy and sorrow, promotion and humiliation, we may satisfy ourselves that ours is an average lot; and if we are rational, we shall be content. Who are we that we ought to expect more or better than our fellows! The wise man is satisfied if, taking all things together, the common mean has been struck. In all departments Nature loves the average, does not long go beyond it or sink beneath it, and in human life that average is usually maintained as in the physical sphere; this is what we should reckon for, and with this the philosophic mind is content.

This theory of regarding life and finding peace is more or less specious, but entirely false and impracticable. To begin with, it would be wellnigh impossible, if not altogether so, justly to appraise

conflicting circumstances, to find the delicate equation of contradictory events, to fix the mean between profoundly complex and mysterious experiences; but, even if this could be done, the result would secure no permanent peace. The experiences of life, the moods of the soul, the emotions of ecstasy and agony excited by the severe alternations of our fortune—these cannot be dealt with mathematically. It is not the average that we have to think about, nearly so much as the extreme; it is the crisis that we must contemplate and provide against. The Marathi proverb warns thus quaintly: "The average depth of the river is up to the knee"—the explanation of this cryptic saying being this: A traveller wishing to ford a river inquired of a rigid mathematician as to its depth, and was answered in the terms of the proverb; but when, after wading awhile through shallow water, the traveller reached the midst of the stream, he found it suddenly dipped to a considerable depth, in which he perished. The notion of the average depth proved fatally misleading. It is much the same with life: the average may be disregarded, the heights and depths of circumstance and feeling are what we have chiefly to think about and to provide against. All clever

philosophical theories are at an end when the crisis comes, and those who are unfortified against the extremes of experience pay the bitter penalty.

"From the verge of the precipice will I cry unto Thee, O Lord." It is for that brink we must be ready. To say that our path is alternately one of roses and thorns, now smooth now rough, level to-day and steep to-morrow, and that therefore ours is an average pathway demanding average sense and grace and no more, is a delusion; one of these days there will be no pathway at all, our feet will be slipping over the brink, and we shall find ourselves face to face with abject failure, paralysing disappointment, overwhelming sorrow, ghastly maladies, death. The ordinary highway is not the test of faith and principle; the exceeding high mountain, Gethsemane, Calvary, Golgotha—terrible temptation, forsakenness, deep suffering, the hour of dissolution, these are the ordeals we must endure, and for which we ought to stand prepared. "Deep calleth unto deep." No matter how long the shallows may continue, one day we shall dip into the depths, wrestle with the billows, fight for our breath; and that day will sadly disturb the tranquil average. For years life may be tolerable enough; but sorrowful events and dark hours

quickly bring up the arrears of a lifetime, and shake us to the centre. Are we ready for this? A chain, a girder, a pillar are not calculated for ordinary but for exceptional strain. A great faith in God, a steadfast trust in Him who died for us and whose death is the price of our peace, a love that many waters cannot quench nor the floods drown, a hope that is practically infinite—in these great qualities, convictions, and expectations lies the solution of the problem of life's desperate situations.

“Every moment of ordinary existence goes to determine what an individual will do in a crisis.” The importance of the hackneyed, commonplace days here comes to light. In uneventful times we prepare for the crisis, or allow it to go by default. The wisdom, economy, and diligence of a merchant in ordinary times guarantee him against a crisis; or the absence of such qualities seriously compromises him whenever the blow falls. The conduct of a nation in the years of peace weighs in one scale or the other the ultimate decision of its fate in war; and, indeed, its general conduct in ages of prosperity regulates the strength with which it must endure the shock of adversity. As Ruskin writes: “No nation ever had, or will have, the power of suddenly developing, under

the pressure of necessity, faculties it had neglected when it was at ease; nor of teaching itself in poverty the skill to produce what it never in opulence had the sense to admire." All this bears directly upon our spiritual history. In the season of ordinary life when we are free from stress and strain, when successive days bring only uniform duty and trite experiences, we determine the issue of the day of trial. If in the spaces comparatively exempt from temptation and trouble we maintain discipline, keep watch, live in the spirit of faithfulness, improve all spiritual privilege, and daily renew the soul, it shall be well with us in the hour when the rain descends, the floods come, and the wind blows; but to let down our strength, relax our muscle, and neglect our lamp in quiet times is to court ruin on doomsday. In fact, there are no ordinary days, for what appear such determine the red-letter days and the black-letter. He who walks wisely in the sunshine shall not fall a victim to the storm; he who is faithful on smooth pathways will be delivered when he comes to the brow of the hill, as his Master was. Every moment of ordinary existence determines our fate at the crisis.

XV

FORECLOSURE

And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.—
OBADIAH 17.

HOW much of the inheritance of the individual Christian and of the Christian Church is yet unclaimed or unrealized! As the Israelites failed to conquer the land upon which they entered, or to retrieve it when lost, so, for various reasons, the spiritual Israel fails to actualize its possessions. Most of us as yet hold only a green border of the inheritance which is our Lord's bequest. The first thing in life is surely that we possess ourselves, no other proprietorship being of much account until this is established. We sometimes complain that many persons are so aggressive that we "cannot call our soul our own." It is quite possible that it is not our own, whatever it may be called. We allow society to filch it away, to occupy it, and the primary right

of manhood is in abeyance. A modern writer thus laments this alienation: "It is tragic how few people ever 'possess their soul' before they die. Most people are other people. Their thoughts are some one else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." The individual faculty, right, duty, and character fail of influential recognition. Within each man is a new world, but every one is not a Columbus. "*My soul*" carries with it the conviction of my talent, calling, responsibility; and until we truly possess our soul in the sense of personal ability, judgment, and service, we are poor indeed, whatever our conventional rank or reputation. The fact, the burden, and the glory of personality are realized as we recognize our relation to God, our dependence upon Him, and our ultimate accountability to Him. Then we no longer know ourselves as scraps of an unfenced common, but, as hedged gardens of the King's right-hand planting which we must dress and keep, we attain the consciousness of a solemn and glorious proprietorship. Henceforward no socialistic swarm can stifle within us that saving inherent sense of individual being which is the source of dignity, conscience, and power. In fellowship with God we seize our-

selves; we more and more realize the splendid property implied in a living soul.

How much remains to be claimed and appropriated in Christian doctrine! Some of us look at the map of the world, and are startled to think how little of it we have explored: may we not cherish a similar sense when we look into the Christian creed, the map of a far vaster universe? Take the Apostles' Creed; whilst in one sense we believe it, in another and deeper sense we have never possessed our possession. How Dr. Dale came to publish *The Living Christ* is well known. He was writing an Easter sermon; and when halfway through, the thought of the risen Lord broke in upon Him as it had never done before. " 'Christ is alive,' I said to myself; 'alive!' and then I paused; 'alive!' and then I paused again; 'alive! Can that really be true? Living as really as I myself am? I got up and walked about, repeating 'Christ is living! Christ is living!' At first it seemed strange and hardly true, but at last it came upon me as a burst of sudden glory: 'Yes, Christ is living.' It was to me a new discovery. I thought that all along I had believed it; but not until that moment did I feel sure about it." May we not take each article of the

Creed, and feel that we hold it pretty much as Dale held the article of the resurrection before this awakening? The doctrines of the Divine Fatherhood, the redeeming Son, and the Holy Ghost, of forgiveness, sanctification, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life are not possessed by us because they do not possess us. We touch without seizing them, and they do not seize us. For the sake of determining a question in botany, a scientist recently tried to attract insects by showing them the reflection of flowers in a mirror; but he soon found that with very rare exceptions the insects went straight to the real flowers, and occupied themselves on them without paying any attention to the reflections. Our creeds, like mirrors, reflect the eternal verities; but, unlike the bees, we largely content ourselves with the reflections, and realize only faintly the sweetness and virtue of the substantial and vital truths of salvation. How rarely we persist to get hold of the cardinal facts as Dale did in that privileged moment! Acquiescing in the article of faith, and retaining the name of the great truth it expresses, tends to keep us out of the reality. We need to take our Bible afresh and ask ourselves how far we have actually entered upon this inexhaustible

world of truth, privilege, and promise. Alas! most of us know only its fringe. We must become more earnest students of the sacred page; if we are to possess the gold, we must first be prospectors. We must study it more in an attitude of sympathetic expectation and desire. We must habitually ponder its sayings in our heart. Every time we recite the Creed, or chant the *Te Deum*, let us attack it by personal thought, sympathy, and appropriating faith.

By the sanctification of the common experiences of practical life we enter into possession of the truth. If the creeds explain life, life no less interprets the creeds. Great scientists who mentally perceive quite clearly the effect of certain chemical combinations yet prefer to watch the process in an actual experiment; they realize the truth then as they cannot do in the abstract; and similarly the truths of the higher world demonstrate themselves best in the strain, sorrow, and sweetness of actual daily life. A striking testimony on this subject is given in a letter addressed by William Davies to Professor William Knight. "An illness like mine reveals many things to the soul. One is the vast difference between theoretic or unprac-

tised religion and philosophy and experimental. My conclusion is that we learn nothing from theory, and that is the reason why life is so hard a school. Everything of value to us must be *a suffered experience*; otherwise, little or nothing is acquired. All evolution is through suffering, and there is no other mode of advancement and progress. That is my discovery." The young Christian recites the catechism which defines the true riches, and the young preacher in the systematic theology which he has so thoroughly mastered has an excellent catalogue of spiritual treasure; but it will take years of duty and difficulty, of joy and sorrow, to convert the "phantom millions" into the sterling gold of positive knowledge and assurance. Let this, then, reconcile us to the hard school of life; here, and only here, can the abstract, shadowy truth prove itself as solid as the rock and precious beyond all imagination. The stress of circumstance, the conflicts with temptation, the burdens of duty, the pangs of illness, loss, and bereavement, are bringing heavenly teachings and promises out of the clouds and making them "our very own." In our pulsations information, speculation, and logic pass into first-hand knowledge, conviction, power, and life, that no man

takes from us. "In your patience ye shall win your souls."

Everywhere in the New Testament Christian character and experience are represented as exceedingly broad and rich beyond compare, yet few explore the lengths and breadths of the good land. Could any contrast be sharper, and in many respects sadder, than that which obtains between the spiritual affluence of the ideal believer of the Epistles and the actual poverty of spirit and character of the average modern Christian? The power, peace, and joyfulness, the fullness of consecration, purity, and blessing of the ideal saint imply a millionaire; the moral faintness and faultiness of the contemporary professor suggest the pauper. Miss Marianne North, writing of the splendid luxuriance of Brazil, declares that every rock of certain districts of that favoured land bore a botanical collection fit to furnish any hot-house in England. The thoughtful reader of the letters of St. Paul, St. Peter, or St. John must often feel that they contain hundreds of glowing passages expressive of spiritual sentiment and promise, any one of which, fully realized, would cause our soul to swell with hallowed emotion, and beautify our character with brightest hues of heavenly perfec-

tion. St. Paul is fond of speaking of "the earnest of the Spirit"; and it is only so far that we have gone in faith, experience, and character. The sod in the cage of the lark is not a summer landscape; despite a few cunning weeds and shells, the aquarium is not the great and wide sea: yet cage and aquarium stand in about the same relation to landscape, sky, and ocean that our average experience does to the plenitude of blessing prepared for the faithful. To the end of this life it can only be that we know "the earnest" of the promise; but may we not know far more of it than we do? How constantly does Charles Wesley incite us to inherit our inheritance!—

Rejoicing now in earnest hope,
I stand, and from the mountain-top
See all the land below;
Rivers of milk and honey rise,
And all the fruits of Paradise
In endless plenty grow.

Oh that I might at once go up!
No more on this side Jordan stop,
But now the land possess;
This moment end my legal years,
Sorrows, and sins, and doubts, and fears,
A howling wilderness.

There is a final direction in which we must vindicate our right—the reclamation of the world

for Christ. Before He left us our Master gave His Church the title-deeds of the whole earth, and instructed us to claim it for Him. He who has redeemed the world waits to take possession. "But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." Through the power and beauty of holy teaching, holy lives, and holy sacrifices shall Christ get His own, and rule the nations as their rightful Lord.

XVI

THE MAIN TRUST

Keep yourselves in the love of God.—JUDE 21.

IT might be thought that a state of love cannot be the result of a sense of duty, brought about by purpose and effort; but really the possession of a warm heart is more a consequence of personal attention and diligence than at first sight appears. "Building up yourselves"; "keep yourselves." Jude recognizes that it is through the power and faithfulness of God that we are saved; yet this saving grace is vouchsafed only as we actively avail ourselves of it. We often speak of "leaving ourselves in the hands of God"; and if this phrase means a perfect confidence that when we have done our duty God will do the rest, it is well: but if it is an excuse for the neglect of personal watchfulness and strenuousness, it expresses a fatalism we cannot expect God to honour.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is a matter of *knowledge*. We love Him with the mind as His perfections appeal to our intelligence and imagination. To a certain extent His beauty is reflected in Nature, and every fresh appreciation of the wisdom and goodness expressed in the things that are made kindles anew the wonder and gratitude of the soul. The ray of a star, the perfume of the lily, or a bar of bird-music is sufficient to make a true heart better and warmer. In a yet fuller and surer degree the perfections of God are declared in revelation, and we cannot sympathetically linger over the sacred page without our heart burning within us. Do we not, then, need to cultivate more the habit of contemplation? By a distinct act of thought we must again and again remind ourselves how worthy God is to be loved. His glory does not impress us simply because it is always before our eyes in His works, ways, and word; we need to "muse" on the revelations of the Eternal Mind and Love until the greatness, fitness, and graciousness of things charm our reason, kindle our admiration, and prompt our affection. The works of the Lord are great in wonder and beauty, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein, and it is essential that we habitually

turn aside to see the great sight if we mean to keep alive the flame on the heart's altar.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is a matter of *memory*. "And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Then immediately follows the commandment that they should love God with all their heart, and in due order follow the rest of the commandments which ordain obedience unto life. The recollection of the Divine Love bringing them out of the house of bondage was to provoke their love and constrain their obedience. Throughout the Old and New Testaments we observe that at every opportunity lawgiver, psalmist, prophet, or apostle recites afresh the story of the great deliverance from Egypt, so that the national love and enthusiasm may be maintained. To keep ourselves in the love of God, we must often go back to the story of our redemption in Christ Jesus. When the fire went out on the altar of the Greek, he took a burning-glass and relit it with the rays of the sun; and when darkness and frost steal over our heart, we must elicit a new flame in the memory of God's redeeming grace in Christ Jesus. The admonition to keep ourselves in the love of

God is a call to the Cross. We must repeatedly go back to the time when He first saved our soul from death, our eyes from tears, our feet from falling.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is a matter of *will*. There is great spontaneity about the origin and life of love, but without the action of the will it is little more than fleeting fancy and feeling. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . with all thy strength." This can only mean that we ought to love the Lord our God with the full force of decision and purpose. In the sovereign faculty of will metaphysicians find the centre and strength of personality. Our love to God must not be vague sentiment tincturing our talk with a pale poetry, but the settled purpose and determination of the soul commanding, compelling, triumphing in all the crises of life. "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength." Love without will is the merest froth; but springing from the depths of the soul, expressing a firm and hearty conviction and resolution, it passes into the master-passion of life. Let it, then, be our settled purpose to keep a warm heart. "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength." I will not permit abounding iniquity to chill my heart, or abounding prosperity

to steal it. I will not allow Nature, humanity, self, or any idols of the world, to have dominion over me, but I will love Thee; I will watch, and lest time and circumstance should spoil the fervour and freshness of the heart, I will ever welcome new awakenings and inspirations.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is a matter of *faith*. "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith." Observe how the apostle represents a lively faith in the doctrines of Christ as necessary to a continuance in love. It is often argued as though it were all the better to trust our Christian life to a vapoury sentiment than to cherish definite dogmatic views whose influence seems unfriendly to the poetry of feeling; but that is not the teaching of St. Paul, St. John, and St. Jude. They hold that character must rest on the basis of a definite and settled creed, and that so far from such a faith being inimical to fervent love, it is the condition of its existence, continuance, and increase. Faith is energised by love; yet unless faith discover the substance of things hoped for, and supply the evidence of things not seen, love lacks the fuel for its kindling spark. The most seraphic saints, whose character and career

make the purple patches of ecclesiastical history, were equally distinguished for their positive faith and burning affection, holiness, and zeal. If we would keep the heart warm, we must beware of looseness and instability of belief.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is a matter of *fellowship*. "Praying in the Holy Spirit." Human love often abates and dies through lack of fellowship. Contact with the beloved must be secured if affection is to remain vital, and even when the loved ones are separated from us by death we must give them a constant presence in imagination if they are to continue to move our heart. So uninterrupted fellowship with God is the condition of abiding fervour. Just in proportion as communion with Him is real and close so is love deep and abiding. Every time the Holy Spirit actuates our heart and we truly speak with God, the pure fire is relighted. The love of God is shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Spirit as He inspires the effectual prayer.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is a matter of *conduct*. It is a great truth that in the order of thought love goes before obedience. That is evidenced by the fact that the first commandment enjoins love. Christ observes the same order: "If

a man love Me, he will keep My words." But it is an equally important truth that the keeping of the commandment is conservative of love. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." Keeping the commandment, we prove that it is holy, just, and good, and glorify Him whose transcript it is. Nothing more directly or seriously lowers the temperature of the heart than failure in practical faithfulness; whilst one of the chiefest prizes of obedience is that it gives a richer consciousness of the love of God. If we would abide in God's love, we must trust Him, honour Him, obey Him, and every day will supply fresh reasons why we should delight in Him.

Keeping ourselves in the love of God is a matter of *hope*. "Looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." It is through His mercy that we hope for eternal salvation and blessedness. How is it possible to anticipate this without the heart catching fire? Memory runs back and kindles our love by reviewing the gifts and deliverances of past years: hope speeds forward, and is dazzled by the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, and which are

revealed unto us by His Spirit. A peep into glory is a fine cure for a fainting heart.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Love is not to be a rare mood of the soul, but its sublime habit. Travellers in the East tell of the striking difference in the appearance of the same tract of country at different seasons of the year. What at one time is a garden, glowing with brilliant hues, and rich with pasture, at another is an absolute waste, frightful and oppressive from its sterility. So is it too commonly with the soul, which at one time is like a watered garden glowing in the heavenly sunshine and then directly cold and desolate. It ought not so to be. God's love to us is ever glowing, revealing itself in new and richer tokens, and our love to Him should reflect the same constancy.

"Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen."

XVII

THE EFFICACY OF APPRECIATION

But thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or thou again, why dost thou set at nought thy brother?—ROMANS xiv. 10 (R. V.).

FEW things more retard spiritual growth, or more effectually blight the joy of life, than the habit of criticism and depreciation. Mozley teaches, in his *University Sermons*: "A life of enmities is greatly in opposition to growth in holiness"; but what falls short of enmities, even the habit of discovering and emphasizing what we may regard as the seamy side of men, things, and events is intensely unwholesome and injurious. That depreciative criticism is hurtful we may soon perceive by watching its influence upon our own heart. James Smetham writes to a correspondent: "Don't get into the focus of criticism. Many men spoil their enjoyment of art by looking on it as something to pull in pieces rather than something to enjoy, and lead them to enjoy Nature, and through Nature to

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enjoy God. How wretched is that feverish, satiated, complaining spirit of criticism! Never contented, never at rest!"

By this selfsame spirit of determined fault-finding we not only spoil the enjoyment of art, but our enjoyment of everything. Of course we must discriminate between the qualities and values of things; life would be insipid, and we should miss its great teachings, without constant criticism of character and affairs, but it is singularly difficult to preserve criticism pure and generous. Base alloys readily mingle with it. We complain of the weather, the climate, or the scenery, when there is no ground whatever for querulousness; our fault-finding is not the expression of an exacting sense of beauty, as we flatter ourselves, but simply ignorance, ingratitude, and irreverence. We complain of the monotonousness, meanness, and misery of our lot, and suppose that such criticism is the revolt of a great soul dominated by noble ideals, the fact being that our discontent is bred of blindness, pride, and unthankfulness. We complain of the doings and achievements of our fellows, insisting on their general unworthiness; and although we delude ourselves that our criticism is purely impersonal and intellectual, and wholly inspired by a love of perfection, God

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knows that our harsh judgments are sicklied o'er with envy, jealousy, and uncharitableness. Nothing is more difficult than to preserve criticism sweet, reasonable, and generous.

The habit of running things down is no sign of mental superiority, although many imagine it to be so; far oftener it is an indication of mental impotence and obliquity. "The monkey," according to Mr. Lockwood Kipling, "has a passion for picking things to pieces"; and that passion is the characteristic of inferior men. "Intelligent men are easily pleased," testifies the Turkish proverb; and it is true. Without question the highest intellects are specially appreciative. We do not prove the quality of our genius by cavil and deduction, by an unwillingness to be pleased and a readiness to censure, but by doing some worthy thing handsomely. As Drummond puts it: "It is easier to criticise the best thing superbly than to do the smallest thing indifferently." To blow upon persons, to carp at their endeavours, and to handle things generally in a fastidious and disparaging spirit, is the sure sign of a mean and narrow intellect. Nor is the habit of picking holes in our brethren an evidence of moral and spiritual superiority. "And Jesus spake also this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they

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were righteous, and set all others at nought." That was the sting of their condemnation—"they despised others," they "set all others at nought." It was chiefly this habit of depreciation that branded them as being superficial and false. To suspect men, to impute to them poor motives, to construe their actions uncharitably, and to be niggardly of encouragement and praise, is to discover and perpetuate the hollowness of our own character.

Ah! too easily do we get "into the focus of criticism," and it chills our whole being and life. It is possible to be angry without sin, but only rare saints in rare moments touch that fire without being burned; and whilst it is possible to criticise in the pure love of truth, such criticism remains a dangerous ordeal even to the saintliest. Whenever we diagnose, disapprove, and condemn we need to be richly saturated with the spirit of our Master, if we ourselves are not to be the worse for the unpleasant task. There is something in all stricture that is close kin to the worst elements of our nature. Yet how readily and largely do we yield to this tendency! Looking on the wonderful world, we see little to extol; subjects of a marvellous divine government, we chiefly demur to its ordinations; entrusted with the oracles of God

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replete with sublime treasures, we spend far more time in analysing and decrying their contents than we do in glorifying Him who has thus made the light to shine in our darkness.

Oh for the gift of vision, that we might behold the teeming marvels and delights of this fair earth, whose most modest shapes are rich in bloom and beauty! Oh for the gift of faith and love, that we might interpret truly the events of life, and find in each a theme for delectable song! Oh for the heavenly charity which can recognize in our brethren patience, kindness, and heroism, where a niggling intellect can see nothing but imperfection and failure! Oh that we might behold with open face the goodness of God in Jesus Christ, and live in the spirit of adoring wonder and loving consecration! If we do not grow in grace, let us turn over a new leaf; let us try the focus of appreciation instead of that of criticism; let us be freer to see the beautiful, to appreciate the good, to praise the high; and if we are only humble, sympathetic, and pure, the glory and joy of life will stand freshly revealed in everything, the law of praise will be on our lips, and in the genial glow we shall grow as flowers and palms in the sun.

XVIII

THE SOLICITUDE OF SUCCESS

Then David the king went in, and sat before the Lord; and he said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me thus far? And this was yet a small thing in Thine eyes, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come; and this too after the manner of men, O Lord God! And what can David say more unto Thee? for Thou knowest Thy servant, O Lord God.—2 SAMUEL vii. 18-20 (x. v.).

THROUGH the lips of Nathan David received from God a personal message of the greatest moment: "Moreover, the Lord telleth thee that the Lord will make thee an house. . . . He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. . . . And thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David." Then the king went in and sat before the Lord, breaking out into the language of the text, which is of the nature of an ex-

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postulation. He did not receive the message as one he had a right to expect; no exultation is expressed, only surprise and solicitude; his soul is troubled by his rare fortune, troubled as men generally are by disaster. Yet is not this a common experience of sincere and devout souls? They are humbled rather than elated by the honours they receive; the praises lavished upon them and their doings surprise and chasten; the unlooked-for riches excite in their heart a troubled wonder; their specially happy lot seems so far in excess of what they might reasonably expect that they dare hardly realize it; exceptional health, affluence, promotion, or felicity gives them a sense of positive uneasiness and painfulness. "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me thus far?" It may seem paradoxical to say so, but in deep, true souls disappointment and disaster often cause less anxiety and questioning than brilliant success occasions. We are less nervous suffering storm and shipwreck than when borne by the flowing tide. We know what we are, we remember the errors, sins, and unworthiness which have marked our career, and we cannot understand our good fortune; we suspect that we are being lifted up to be cast down; we have some-

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thing of the uncomfortable feeling of persons who find themselves in possession of treasures which do not belong to them; we are perturbed by the secret fear lest these windfalls and triumphs may in one way or other precipitate our ruin, as superior beauty is often fatal to birds and flowers; and we are plagued by the dread lest these earthly successes should aggravate our doom as the good things of Dives did. Lazarus seems safer with his indigence and suffering than we with the wealth and glory which puzzle us. Who am I, and what is my house, that I should be so distinguished? "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show in thee My power." God can mysteriously punish perverse men by lifting them up, and making gold, purple, and garlands the instruments of their chastisement; and in "all times of our wealth" we are haunted by apprehensions that all is not right, and lest our glory and joy should prelude some sort of calamity and humiliation. Success, especially sudden and singular success, brings many heart-searchings and solitudes.

To a certain extent this is the right spirit in which to accept accessions of wealth and power. It is a far truer temper than to regard our success as the reward of merit, and to boast ourselves

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in our good fortune. To recognize our frailties, and to acknowledge that riches and honours are God's free gifts, is the true attitude towards all worldly advancement. Yet at the same time we must not permit morbid feeling to blind us to the graciousness of God, and to rob us of the sweetness of the good things He bestows. The "gifts of the Greeks" were deprecated by their neighbours, it being generally understood that these favours were prompted by sinister motive or design; but there is nothing sinister in the bright things freely given us of God. The pagan in the day of his success was afraid of the jealousy with which the gods were reputed to view the uncommon happiness of mortals; but the Divine Giver is better known by us, and His delight in all the pure joy of His people is a great truth of that revelation which is "the master-light of all our seeing." Let us, then, learn to trust God in His bright providences as we do in His dark ones, and to take His richest gifts without suspicion or misgiving. It is well to feel our unworthiness of the least of His mercies, yet we may greet the shower of gold or roses with the utmost confidence and expectation. It is a fine trait in the Christian character when we are able to fill high places and to enjoy goodly things in the spirit of unquestion-

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ing trust and appreciation. After the king had humbled himself before God because of these extraordinary favours, he concludes: "And what can David say more unto Thee? for Thou knowest Thy servant, O Lord God. For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou wrought all this greatness to make Thy servant know it." A suspicious, ascetic spirit is not the highest mood of life.

Let us not always say,
"Spite of this flesh to-day,
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry, "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps
soul!"

If it please God to exalt us to brilliant posts, to invest us with authority and influence, to dower us with riches, to give us favour in the sight of the people, to establish our house, let us dismiss all heathen solicitude, and, praying for God's grace, use everything for His glory. "Now therefore let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may continue for ever before Thee: for Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever."

XIX

THE SENSE OF SIN

Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and for your abominations.—EZEKIEL xxxvi. 31.

WHATEVER Israel might think of himself at the present hour, the day was coming when he would regard himself with different eyes, when he would judge himself, and pronounce upon himself sentence of death.

A true sense of sin implies *the consciousness of the fact of our sinfulness*. So far as our intellectual life is concerned, at different periods our estimate of ourselves varies immensely. Whilst young we are confident and self-sufficient. With the least knowledge and experience we believe implicitly in our own judgment, and on all occasions are ready to dogmatise; we promptly contradict our seniors, scorn the advice of wisdom and affection, resolutely take our own way, and yet despite

our ignorance and conceit are entirely satisfied with ourselves. But years bring experience to all, and sense to some; and looking back on their earlier selves, the wise are distressed: they see how egregiously vain, stupid, and intolerable they were. The older man knows that his younger self was a fool. After the same manner our estimate of our moral self undergoes the most extreme modification if we are brought to see ourselves in the true light. In earlier days we question why the world was made after this fashion, we arraign God's government, we are fully occupied in criticising the order of things, we feel perfectly satisfied with our character and conduct, and reckon that whatever happens to us we are wronged rather than anything else. The sinner's satisfaction with himself is profound. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The day comes, however, when by divine grace we view ourselves in another light. We see that we are wrong, and not God; that if the world is wrong we are responsible for its disorder; and that our spirit and conduct with which we are contented, nay, of which we are proud, reeks with unbelief, selfishness, ingratitude, and wilfulness. We

know ourselves to be sinful, perverse in mind and heart.

A true sense of sin implies the consciousness that our sinfulness is *personal*. "Your *own* evil ways." Ezekiel is the prophet of individuality, and here he singles out the individual sinner, seeking to bring home to him the consciousness of his personal fault. Before we become truly awake to sin we delude ourselves by identifying it with *Nature*. Just as certain natural laws work out eclipses, volcanoes, earthquakes, and blizzards, so we imagine that other laws work out in murderous tempers, greedy appetites, wrathful and defiant lusts and disobediences. It is only natural law in the spiritual world. We are fond of boasting of our ability to control the laws and forces of the world—taming the lightning, harnessing Niagara, and coercing sun, storm, and stream into our service: intellectual pride gloats over these triumphs; but as soon as it becomes a question of responsibility for our moral faults, we are in haste to abase ourselves, and to plead that natural laws and forces ride over us roughshod. Again, we delude ourselves by charging sin back upon our *ancestry*. Our failings are inherited, and are not therefore properly ours. Much about us is inherited, but we must be careful about imputing

our faults to our ancestors. Men and women never cordially give the credit of their strength and beauty, their wit and virtue, to their ancestry—these they coolly and emphatically claim as distinctively their own; but their anger, pride, gluttony, and selfishness are unblushingly debited to their grandfather. It will not do. Much about us is inherited from man, but a little something about us is inherited from God, and that little something—that divine gleam, spark, breath, that splinter of heaven and eternity, if faithfully evoked and cherished, can resist, master, and transfigure deluges of inherited animalism and hoary accumulations of evil bias. We blind ourselves by blaming *society*. We argue that all men are dominated by the spirit of the age, by the social atmosphere they breathe, and therefore the community is blamed for the lapses of the individual. Yet how often do men who argue like this in regard to their sordid and soiled character boast of their social independence, their self-reliance and sufficiency, and proceed proudly and successfully to set the community at defiance! If their commercial advantage or political ideals are at stake, they are good against the world; yet when society tempts to vanity and vice, no choice is left them but meekly to succumb! No, no; our sins are our

own, and it is at once a bitter and a blessed day when we put away all sophistries, and cry with the psalmist, "Pardon *mine* iniquity, for it is great."

A true sense of sin implies the consciousness of its *hatefulness*. The text speaks of evil with the sense of horror and loathing—"detestable" things, "iniquities," "abominations," "filthiness," "uncleanness." How tenderly and apologetically certain writers speak of ghastly vices! Enamoured of the picturesque, they are impatient of moral distinctions: whatever lends itself to poetry, romance, and artistry is to them legitimate and delightful. Thus a distinguished Frenchman, Paul Bourget, once wrote: "The psychologist hardly knows what crime, contempt, and indignation signify. A chemist is never indignant at a drug because it happens to be poisonous."

The true thinker must know no anger or contempt in the presence of a crime; he must regard it with the indifference with which the chemist regards a poisonous drug or the naturalist a poisonous flower: it is what it is, and that it should excite any feeling of contempt or indignation is absurd. Again Bourget writes: "The artist admits that there are virtues which are not lovely and corruptions which are splendid, or, rather, he

cares nothing for virtue or for corruption. He knows that there are beautiful things and things that are ugly, and he knows nothing else." This cool unconcern in the presence of sin expresses the impassibility of the average sinner; evil does not disgust, dismay, or grieve as being hateful; beguiled by its pleasantness, lucrateness, or picturesqueness, it evokes at most only a passing uneasiness or languid disapprobation. It is altogether another thing when the soul is convinced of sin and judgment. "Ye shall loathe your own face," declares the text. As a patient afflicted with a malignant disease shrinks with horror from the sight of his own face when for the first time he looks in the mirror, so does the convicted sinner shrink at the sight of his heart and life as revealed in the light of God's holiness. "Ye that fear the Lord *hate* evil." "I repent and abhor myself in sackcloth and ashes."

A true sense of sin implies the consciousness of its *guilt*. "And shall judge yourselves unworthy to live." We judge ourselves, condemn ourselves, pass the sentence of death upon ourselves. We know that the difference is simply immeasurable between a mistake and a sin. A man may be liable to punishment for a mistake, as it involves culpable carelessness; but a simple error of

judgment, a lapse of memory, an oversight, belongs to a mild category compared with the deliberate breach of the moral law. We feel that the difference is infinite between a misfortune and a sin. When one is overtaken by blindness, crippled by rheumatism, smitten by fever, or shattered by an accident, we do not blame and punish, we pity and help; but a transgression of God's law awakens quite another order of ideas and sentiments. A penitent truly convinced of sin knows that his fault is in no sense mere ignorance or misunderstanding; its mental character is not its feature at all: it has little to do with the intellect, it is a case of conscience in the sight of God. The convicted one knows that his sin is no misfortune, that which comes upon us without our complicity, but rather an act of ingratitude and disobedience springing out of the personal will. The penitent stands face to face with the righteous and loving God, and is filled with surprise, grief, and shame. We have done what deserves utterest reprobation and is worthy of death.

The sense of sin is first created by the Divine Spirit causing us to see and feel the purity and love of God, especially as these attributes are revealed in Jesus Christ. This is the golden ground against which sin stands out in terrible

relief. And the sense of the folly, shame, and peril of sin becomes more acute all through the regenerate life. Observe the context of the passage we are considering, and it will be seen that the sense of sin and sorrow for sin follow forgiveness, reconciliation, and the blessedness of the new life. Read verses 25-31. The sense of sin comes before conversion, but it becomes increasingly vivid throughout the whole course of the regenerate life. The soul growing in holiness recoils in horror from old sins. As we realize the glory and blessedness of the pure heart and life, we shudder to look into the miry clay out of which we were rescued. It takes a lifetime of consecration to understand what our sin implied of dishonour and danger, and how truly vast was the love that forgave it and the merit that bore it away. Only with the completion of life do we complete our penitence. As St. Paul went on to comprehend the grandeur of the law, the love of God, and the hope of heaven did he feel the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It was when he was delivered from his idols that he saw how ugly they were; when he tasted the blessedness of keeping the law, that he understood the heinousness of violating it; and when he dwelt in Canaan that he saw with glowing clearness of vision the misery and guilt of the

house of bondage. It is a reliable sign of growth in grace when we detect in ourselves a growing sensibility to the evil which once reigned over us, and an ever-increasing horror of it. The apprehension of the good gives but the greater feeling to the worse.

XX

THE POWER OF SERVICE

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.—DANIEL xii. 3.

THEY who have instructed their fellows by means of word and deed, who have awakened them to steadfastness and fidelity and strengthened their faith, shall shine with heavenly splendour in the life everlasting.
Note:—

1. The *exalting power* of service. "Shall shine as the firmament," shall reach the utmost loftiness of character and greatness. If we would shine as the stars, we must minister, must turn men to righteousness and life. We become great through knowledge, fortune, valour, and genius; yet the supreme greatness comes through service, sympathy, and sacrifice. It is a question in heraldry whether Duke Godfrey, who was crowned with thorns in Jerusalem, ought to rank with kings or not; but we all know that He who was crowned with thorns for our redemption is the kingliest of

kings, and that all who, like Him, suffer that they may serve, share His eternal greatness and renown. In attempting to persuade men to righteousness the noblest emotions of the soul are excited; we are brought to think great thoughts, we are constrained to abide in fellowship with the Highest, until our soul glows and shines, reflecting the loftiness, vastness, and splendour of the firmament. They who seek greatness in selfishness never attain more than a pyrotechnic glare, a meteor flash; but, forgetting ourselves in the passion to serve, we are surprised by a greatness like that of the firmament, by a glory beyond that of "the topmost star of unascended heaven."

2. The *illuminating power* of service. The brightness of the firmament, the glory of the stars, suggest the fullness and clearness of those illuminations which come through spiritual service. We do not best gain knowledge in abstract, selfish study, but in the loving service of those who need us; the busy helper of his fellows knows the highest truths, and knows them more clearly and firmly than any selfish thinker can know. A mediæval story relates that whilst a monk was engaged in adorning a missal the monastery bell sounded, summoning him to go forth and minister to the needs of the common people; he was

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tempted to linger with his loved book, but conscience prevailed, and he tore himself away to practical duty; returning to his cell, he found that in his absence angels had covered his pages with rarest illuminations in gold and colours such as mortal eye had not seen before. If we only do the self-denying, humble work of daily helpfulness which God has given us to do, He will grant a light beyond all the discoveries of selfish and idle speculation. As we teach a little child, warn a sinner, guide an inquirer, encourage a penitent, pray with a sufferer, we gain a true, satisfying knowledge never granted to selfish dreaming. The mere theoriser is ever in a fog; he who declines practical service in the passion for literature and controversy knows nothing as he ought to know; whilst he who teaches, prays, and works for those about him who need helping has an understanding as clear as the blue spaces of the firmament, a heart as luminous as the stars.

3. The *purifying power* of service. The bright heaven is the chosen symbol of purity, and the suggestion of the text is that through consecrated service we reach genuine sanctification. Personal holiness is sometimes cultivated quite apart from serious evangelical action; it is sought in reading, devotion, meditation, and fellowship, whilst little,

if any, practical service for mankind is attempted. This is a grave error. The pursuit of personal holiness divorced from a life of practical helpfulness means a mystical, hectic, sentimental holiness which is not the holiness of the New Testament. Cloistered piety reminds one of those showy double-blossoms which never turn into fruit. True, strong, sane sanctity is the creation of sympathy and sacrifice; whilst we turn men to righteousness, we are surprised by a personal righteousness yet more deep and divine. We talk of the "higher life," and thank God for its possibility; but let us never forget that the way to the higher life is through active sympathy with fallen life, ignorant life, sorrowful life. Do you aspire to a high and holy experience, to the lustre and blessedness of a hallowed soul? Live for the salvation of men, and you shall shine like the firmament and glow like the stars.

4. The *rejoicing power* of service. The brightness of the firmament and the serene splendour of the stars remind us of the profound and solemn joy which springs up in sympathetic, magnanimous souls. Many persons in this world have everything they can desire, and yet are miserable. The fact is they live for themselves; and doing this, soon find how little there is to live for. Self-

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ishness sits down to the banquet of life, searches the groaning tables with greedy eyes, is in such a hurry that it cannot say grace, only to find that it has "no power to eat thereof." Are not some Christians strangely depressed and unhappy? What is the matter with them? They are too self-centred, self-conscious, self-seeking—that is the whole truth. The joy that is full and fresh for ever is the joy of unselfishness.

An instructive passage occurs in Wesley's *Journal*. On his voyage home from Georgia he wrote: "Being sorrowful and very heavy (though I could give no particular reason for it), and utterly unwilling to speak close to any of my little flock (about twenty persons), I was in doubt whether my neglect of them was not one cause of my own heaviness. In the evening, therefore, I began instructing the cabin-boy, after which I was much easier." Are not our sorrowful moods and despairs often the consequence of neglected duty? Wrapped up in ourselves, joy ceases from the heart and light fades from the eyes. Instead of wasting days and months in curiously analysing our feeling, let us give the heart leisure from itself and attempt some work of mercy and helpfulness: the secret of our heaviness is not physiological, intellectual, or supernatural; it is the in-

evitable result of an indolent, self-centred soul. We cannot overlook the fact that the sympathetic who throw themselves into philanthropic work and live much with the needy and forlorn are the brightest and most hopeful of mankind. Just recently we accompanied a young lady from the suburbs into London where she spends three days in the week in the most sordid neighborhood, ministering to the aged, sick, and destitute; and what struck us most in our young friend was the sparkle of her hearty cheerfulness. She was as gay as a bride. She is little afflicted with melancholia at any time. Wordsworth speaks of the mind taking "a sober colouring from an eye that hath kept watch o'er man's mortality": but the poet's criticism is only partially true; for, contrary to all likelihood, those who come into closest touch with human suffering, and who seek to relieve it in the spirit of the Master, are singularly serene and hopeful: far from being subdued into sober colours, they reflect the rainbow colours which they bring. In sympathy and sacrifice is a divine magic which banishes personal discontent and suffuses the soul with peace. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be fulfilled."

XXI

THE DETAILS OF LIFE

These ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone.—MATTHEW xxiii. 23 (R. V.).

THE efficiency of some great men has been seriously impaired by their neglect of the uninteresting parts of life and duty. Disraeli confessed of himself, "I want energy in those little affairs of which life greatly consists." This hatred of the trivial, even in cases where detail was of the essence of statesmanship, was acknowledged by his friends to be a cause of his weakness as a Minister. A sympathetic critic wrote concerning him: "He had an overflowing spontaneity of vitality, but very little of what by no means necessarily accompanies it—the power of attending closely to the uninteresting means, for the sake of the interesting end. He liked life to be all interesting, and neglected too much the routine toil which was needful to secure success for the more attractive parts of it." The *Athenæum*, commenting on Charles Henry Pearson, whose life,

despite his brilliant gifts, was conspicuously disappointing, imputed his failure to a certain extent to a characteristic lack of humility and patience. It was his misfortune to be impatient of the day of small things, which is a dangerous indulgence for a man who has to make his way. On the other side, the greatest men, who brought their work to splendid perfection, and whose lives were veritable triumphs, considered no detail of their task too trivial, no uninteresting portions of it too insipid, the truth being, the modest and monotonous details were so scrupulously wrought out that glorious success seemed to flower magically.

Life cannot be all interesting; much that it involves is necessarily stale and flat. Diamonds do not lie so thick in nature as in the *Arabian Nights*; they are rare, scattered, and the miner must delve through masses of common clay and rock before he lights upon the flashing gem: in like manner tedious days of dull spadework mark the intervals of life's jewel days and experiences, and they who shun the drudgery miss the prize. We noted just now how famous men suffered through hatred of detail and despising of the day of small things, and similar impatience and contempt work to the undoing of many. Youth, impatient for success, scamps the detail and drudgery of pupillage and

apprenticeship; the housewife despises the routine which consumes her days; the minister resents the calls and schedules which "fritter away" his precious hours; and men in all ranks and positions are irritated by the necessity of chronicling small beer when their great souls thirst for the wine of kingdoms in cups of gold. In this contempt of triviality we suffer loss. We miss the essential discipline of the trivial, and missing that are not prepared for the greater situations and seasons; ignoring the grandeur of the minute, we defraud ourselves of one of the chief delights of existence; and having neglected insignificant particulars, we have certainly more or less marred the whole result in character and destiny, which is made up of insignificant particulars.

Detail is of the essence of life, and he is great and shall be great who knows it. There is teaching, discipline, and blessing of the highest order in faithfulness in monotonous days and things. Preachers are fond of celebrating the wonderful events which have occurred on mountain-tops and the splendid visions vouchsafed there; the grandeur and romance of celestial heights are full of fascination. But God does not confine His revelations to romantic places. "And the hand of the Lord was there upon me; and He said unto me,

Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee. Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the Lord stood there" (Ezek. iii. 22, 23). On the flat, dull, monotonous stretches of life does God speak with men and show them His glory. And all the future is dependent upon the faithful discharge of humble duty, "the power of attending closely to the uninteresting means, for the sake of the interesting end." Yes, this is exactly what we Christian people require—concentration upon the little, unattractive affairs in which life so greatly consists, knowing that such faithfulness secures supreme rewards. Many bewitching shapes woo us; but Duty, stern daughter of the voice of God, brings the princeliest dowry. Many flower-strewn paths appeal to imagination, sentiment, and self-will; but the path of duty remains the path of glory.

XXII

PARLOUR-SERMONS

Without the word.—I PETER iii. 1

THE apostle wishes to point out how Christian wives may be able to advance the kingdom of God, and he suggests that by their manner of life they may win their pagan husbands to the faith of Christ. "The apostle's thought is this: If the husbands oppose the word, the wives should all the more diligently seek to preserve a Christian walk, in order by it to win over their husbands, even without words, without preaching and exhortation on their part." "Without the word"—that is the point: there is to be no discussion; they are so to live as to make their lives a sermon without words, to work conviction without debate. An old poet indites an epitaph which quaintly expresses the situation:—

Sermons he heard, yet not so many
As left no time to practise any,
He heard them reverently, and then
His practice preached them o'er again.
His Parlour-Sermons rather were
Those to the eye than to the ear.

Much is possible without language; character, when true, strong, and tender, possesses a persuasiveness all its own, and often a persuasiveness beyond that of the finest eloquence. Words may only irritate, argument provoke argument, and debate end by leaving the parties farther asunder than ever, whilst the silent action of superior character and well-ordered conduct compels attention and conviction. Without language the glorious things of nature fascinate and subdue; and the voiceless oratory of pure living acts similarly. In many cases argument is impossible, it is inexpedient, and, for various reasons, frequently unavailing; but the power of a sincere life is always possible—it asserts itself without offence, and works conviction by an irresistible logic. Much may be wrought by a devout woman whose partner is unbelieving. In thousands of instances the woman saves the husband. Without reasonings, expostulations, or rebukes she shows the power and grace of Christ to make life strong and pure; and her modesty, patience, love, and self-denial accomplish what the tongue cannot, wonderful as that member sometimes proves. When a betrothal takes place in the modern Greek Church, the priest offers prayers, imploring God to make the event a happy one, and to bless the

dowry, so that the outer ornaments of the bride may be a continual incitement to her to adorn her soul with such angelic virtues as are proper to the condition of matrimony, into which she is about to enter. Whenever this prayer proves effectual, and the woman's jewels of gold are outshone by her virtues, and her brocades look coarse by the side of the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, her influence upon husband, children, and servants is not less than magical.

"Beholding your chaste behaviour." The word used by the apostle is a singular one, expressing the attitude of surprise and wonder. The husband gazes upon the purity and winsomeness of the wife as when one gazes on a mystery, and he is conscious that at the bottom of it is a strange fact and power which he has not yet comprehended. What is true of the believing wife to an unbelieving husband is equally true of a believing husband towards an unbelieving wife. Once more, verbal exposition or remonstrance may be impossible or unadvisable; the best-intentioned words might unluckily prove infelicitous, whilst the appeal of a dignified life is never intrusive or provocative. And what is true between husband and wife holds equally in many other situations and relationships of life; language by the nature of the case is for-

bidden or rendered impolitic; but even then the servant, workman, shopman, or clerk may by his true life silently plead for higher things, sacred eloquence all the while oozing from him at every pore. Wagner, it is said, ruled the musicians completely by his gestures—yes, even sometimes by his eyes alone. Only the muscles of the face, the expression of the eye, the angles of the mouth, played the orchestral piece along with the musicians. So without words may we set forth and interpret the highest truths—speaking for God in a look, a blush, an accent, or a silence, witnessing for Christ in the signs and acts of simple daily life charming the house, shop, and street with the measures of a celestial music.

If, however, we are to exert this fine, strong influence over those about us, our character must be deep and real. No mere doctrinal acquaintance with the Christian faith gives this secret; and no mere profession of Christian discipleship carries with it the energy of influence. Only as we manifest in the spirit of our mind the truth and love of Jesus, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, can we hope to confound and persuade our unbelieving fellows. Before silence becomes golden our spirit must be rich in unction and sweetness. In Texas and Arizona

there is a strange odourless region. The grapes are luscious and the fruits delightful; but they have no bouquet, and the gorgeous flowers are without fragrance. Is it not somewhat thus with the excellences of many good people? Whilst technically faultless, their character lacks that last perfection which delights and wins over the gainsayer.

XXIII

A DECISIVE TEST OF CHARACTER

But ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations.—LUKE xxii. 28.

CARLYLE'S mother regretfully acknowledged that her gifted son was sore difficult to live with; and tendering something like an apology for his hero, Froude remarks, "Dante and Isaiah were not probably exhilarating companions." We do not know that any evidence exists to give sanction to this supposition. It has often been noted that humorists have their pathetic side; and it is equally true, we think, that just as frequently austere characters reveal a capacity of mirthfulness and affection. But whatever may have been the companionable qualities of Isaiah and Dante, it is clear that our Lord was not difficult to live with. He subjected Himself to this severe test, and bore it triumphantly. He elected twelve disciples to accompany Him and to dwell with Him, and they "continued" with Him throughout His temptations. That they found

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Him in the best and highest sense "an exhilarating companion" is plainly manifest. There is not an event or a word to indicate that the sublimity of His character, the seriousness of His spirit, or the momentousness of His mission made it difficult for His personal attendants to get on with Him. He was ever lovable, and ever loved by them, until one, yielding to covetousness, fell away from loyalty. There was no friction between the disciples and their Lord, but they who knew Him most intimately regarded Him with sincerest reverence and tender affection. Again and again, reading between the lines of the Gospel narrative, we become conscious of the fact that the apostles felt profoundly the charm of their divine Master, and that they keenly enjoyed His delectable fellowship. Condescending, patient, free, He dwelt amongst them, talked with them, chided or soothed them, until He became the object of their enthusiastic admiration, confidence, and love. What is thus manifest in the relations between Christ and His followers is again conspicuously revealed in the home at Bethany. What a silvery idyll is that of Jesus, Lazarus, and the sisters! He who was always seen to advantage shone not less entrancingly in that beautiful home and episode of friendship.



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Are we easy to live with? This is an essential test of the genuineness of character. How we appear to society is comparatively a slight matter, for that chiefly means the estimate of people who do not know us; but how we appear to those who live with us is a very significant matter. A few shallow, hollow courtesies suffice to secure popular favour; only sterling character persuades those who live with us. There is something wrong about persons who are habitually and really difficult to live with. We may explain and excuse our incompatibility by a variety of specious and flattering ingenuities; but usually people hard to live with and to get on with are guilty of serious moral deficiencies. The more we imbibe the spirit of our Master, the more shall we win the good opinion of those with whom we live. If when we finish our friends can write for our epitaph, "He was easy to live with," little more need be said.

XXIV

THE LAST POST

For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved His appearing.—TIMOTHY iv. 6-8 (R. V.).

THUS the illustrious veteran seeks to inspire his young colleagues. He who is putting on the armour listens to these pathetic but inspiring words from the old soldier who prepares to put off the armour which has proved itself in many a conflict.

I. *The Hope of the Apostle.*—Some moralists teach that we ought not in matters of conduct to aim at any reward whatever, the truest virtue being altogether disinterested. Revelation is condemned by teachers of this school because it promises a reward, holds forth a crown. Yet the idea of reward is an instinct of our nature, revealing itself in many ways, and one we cannot escape. On all fields of human life and action a crown is held

forth to such as play the man. An influential section of the school of moralists who condemn Christianity as a selfish system because it holds forth a future reward unconsciously betrays the action of this instinct. It denies the immortality of heaven, and proceeds to promise an immortality on earth. If we are virtuous, it seeks to allure us with the hope that we shall live in the life of all future generations. Were these teachers consistent, they would boldly argue: "Expect no reward whatever; when we die we perish, perish entirely, and for ever; let us not contemplate any reward—in the nature of the case it is an illusion." But they feel bound to satisfy the instinct for reward; they must suggest a crown of some sort, and, denying the solid crown postulated by revelation, they substitute a ghostly crown of earthly immortality. In creature life there is no such thing as absolutely disinterested virtue; on Virtue's head are many crowns, and there is no reason to be ashamed of aiming at any one of them, especially the highest.

When Christianity is accused of maintaining a selfish system of virtue because it promises a crown, the question arises, What kind of a crown? If we examine the Christian hope, there is nothing selfish or ignoble in it; it is a crown of pure gold.

Selfishness sacrifices the higher part of our nature to the lower. We call that system of conduct selfish which proposes the pleasure of the senses as its end and aim. But this is not the motive of the New Testament. The paradise of Mohammed was impossible to St. Paul. We brand that system of conduct as selfish which finds its motive in secular advantage. But Christianity advances no such motive. We do not regard that as selfish which springs from the higher part of our nature and gratifies that part. We do not call a mother's love selfish; her happiness is bound up in the welfare of the child, but it would be a misuse of language to call her affection selfish. We do not call an artist's enthusiasm selfish; his means of livelihood, reputation, and pleasure are bound up with his vocation, but his enthusiasm is not selfish, it is emancipation from self. We do not reckon a scientist's devotion to Nature an expression of selfishness; the love of Nature is the source of his delight, but Darwin amongst his flowers or Lubbock amongst his bees could not justly be ranked with the selfish. We do not reckon the passion of the patriot, Cromwell or Washington, a sign of selfishness; his interest in many ways is bound up with national independence and prosperity, but it were perverse to at-

tempt to resolve the sacrifices of patriots and heroes into selfishness. The clever logician with sleight of words may affect to show that a mother's love, an artist's enthusiasm, a scientist's devotion, a patriot's sacrifices, or a martyr's sorrows are so many revelations of selfishness; but we know as well as we know anything that they are not selfish, that they belong to a transcendental world, that they have passed into a divine quality, that in them the corruptible has put on incorruption. Whatever springs from our highest nature, and gratifies it in a high degree, is not selfishness, and it were folly to call it so. The reward here anticipated by the apostle is of the highest order—"the crown of righteousness," As the mother delights in love, the artist in beauty, the scientist in truth, and the patriot in brotherhood, so St. Paul delights in righteousness—the dignity, wealth, beauty, and felicity of the spirit. The immortality he contemplated was the prolonged pleasure of truth, justice, love, and purity, and in this high and holy sphere no shadow of selfishness can fall.

Selfishness sacrifices the interests of others to personal advantage and happiness. In no way does the Christian system lay itself open to this odious charge. It does not prompt us to *wrong*

others. Alas! how often do men come by violence and fraud to earthly diadems! They wade through slaughter to a throne. Not thus do the saints aim at reward. The Christian system does not justify us in the *neglect* of others. The thought of heaven does not lull into selfish indulgence, rendering us oblivious of the wants and woes of those about us. The Christian faith demands that we *serve* others. No man more clearly perceived the solidarity of the race than the Apostle of the Gentiles, and none served the race more energetically and faithfully than he. His catholic soul finds its habitual expression here: "And not only to me, but also to all them that have loved His appearing." The faith of Christianity is not solitary, but social; not indolent, but earnest; not vague and mystical, but practical and self-sacrificing. It is not, then, to be despised as selfish. It develops and delights our highest nature, and stimulates us to love our generation and to serve it in sublimest sacrifice.

II. *The Grounds of his Hope.*—The anticipation of glory is based on the retrospect of faithfulness.

Life is a conflict, and the apostle had waged it. "I have fought the good fight." He had striven through a gallant struggle. He had contended